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**Ride to Live, Live to Ride: Motorcycle Dispatches from Maceió**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

To my father, who taught me to work hard, tell the truth, take my commitments to others seriously, and whose voice I always hear telling me “No cuesta nada pedir.” To my mother, who showed me the power of my own will. To Mindi, my other mother, my ride or die, who gave me the name BK, helped me develop the wisdom to see the world for what it is, the courage to call out injustice wherever it may appear, and who invented the resistive tactic “I bow to you to hide my laughter.” To Melanie and Tatyanna, my sisters and BBSDs, who always make me smile and whose brilliance and kindness continue to amaze and inspire me. To Kimbo, my BP, my first intellectual sounding board. To my incredible high school teachers, Madame Sidman and Coach Scalese, who put up with my shenanigans, treated me like a daughter instead of the trouble maker that I was, and got me through those days. To my dear friend, Alex Merkovic, who helped me with those shenanigans and stayed a true friend through the years, encouraging me to always be as audacious as possible. To my inspiring college professors, Peggy Sharpe, Juan Carlos Galeano, Zeina Schlenoff, and Robinson Herrera who taught me so much, helped focus my revolutionary consciousness, and set me on this path. And to Scottie, whose life was taken by the road, I miss you.

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## **Abstract**

### **Ride to Live, Live to Ride: Motorcycle Dispatches from Maceió**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

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Traffic codes and highways exist as powerful tools of measurement and coding by the State that attempt to regulate and control the mobility of bodies through space. In Brazil, these measures and codes function according to capitalist hierarchies of commodities, social practices of exclusion that severely debilitate the mobility of all but a few, and the colonial histories upon which these were constructed. This thesis examines such processes at work in the use of motorcycles as a form of transport for low and low-middle income social groups in an urban setting in the Northeast of Brazil. The simplistic categorization of motorcycles as dangerous, a hackneyed explanation for the high number of accidents and fatalities involving motorcycles in Brazil, reveals exclusion and colonial power at work. This thesis aims to explore the presumption and inscription of motorcycles and their riders as inherently dangerous or threatening actors in order to answer the deceptively simple question: why are motorcycles considered hazardous?

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## **Introduction: Estrela Moto**

Traffic codes and highways exist as powerful tools of measurement and coding by the State that attempt to regulate and control the mobility of bodies through space. In Brazil, these measures and codes function according to capitalist hierarchies of commodities, social practices of exclusion that severely debilitate the mobility of all but a few, and the colonial histories upon which these were constructed. This thesis examines such processes at work in the use of motorcycles as a form of transport for low and low-middle income social groups in an urban setting in the Northeast of Brazil. The simplistic categorization of motorcycles as dangerous, a hackneyed explanation for the high number of accidents and fatalities involving motorcycles in Brazil, reveals exclusion and colonial power at work.

In Brazil, motorcycles are chiefly an option for inexpensive transportation. In Maceió (the field site for this project), the recently augmented bus fare is R\$2.50 at present. The average citizen, who depends primarily on the bus, could easily ride four or more times a day (considering transfers and the cultural norm of returning home during lunch hour), creating a monthly cost of over R\$200. With the extension of credit in Brazil, it is possible to finance a motorcycle for less than this. The low range of (new) motorcycles cost between R\$3,500 and R\$6,000 and virtually all dealerships now offer payment plans, some up to 72 months. Even with the cost of taxes and gasoline, it can be more financially viable and practical for many Maceioenses to ride a motorcycle than take the bus. While, by contrast, automobiles in Brazil are notoriously some of the most expensive in the world - mainly due to import taxes - and beyond the financial scope of many household incomes (Novais, September 19, 2012).

The standards for traffic practice - set legislatively by the State; discursively by mass media; and practically by elites who operate luxury vehicles with an implied impunity - are not actually conceived to accommodate the movement of a majority of people and things. This elite logic, in fact, violently acts upon alternatively mobile bodies (like motorcycles) as a by-product of its larger project to control and subordinate certain individuals and groups. During two months of fieldwork in Maceió -AL, Brazil (a city of roughly one million in the Northeast) I spent time with a number of groups and individuals discussing realities of motorcyclists in the city.

## **LAMPIÃO**

Before returning to conduct this research in 2014, I had lived in Maceió for a period of nine months, an experience that first inspired this project. During that time, I had a daily commute to the university, which took an average of three hours each way by bus (about a 40 km distance). The students at the university also warned me about the heightened threat of robbery and assault and robbery on busses and at bus stops. Unfortunately, the university was a special hot spot for such activity - due to its location (removed from the city center, alongside the prison), the prohibition of entrance to the campus by military police, and the large amount of young people with expensive electronics. The culmination of these factors led me to look at alternative options for transportation.

I quickly realized the only practicable alternative was to purchase a motorcycle. A (running) new or used 125cc motorcycle in Maceió can range between R\$1500 - R\$7,500 (\$750 - \$3,750 USD) depending on brand, year, and condition. Honda motorbikes remain among the most popular and trusted on the market, which is generally

reflected in their pricetag (R\$ 4,000 - R\$ 7,500). Other Japanese bikes like Suzuki and Yamaha are also quite popular, but often run for a bit less than Honda, and lose value more quickly once used (R\$ 2,500 - R\$4,500). Chinese brands like Dafra and Shineray are newer to Brazil and occupy the low end of the market (R\$ 1,500 - R\$3,500). They are less trusted (and less mechanically sound) than the Japanese brands that have a longer history in Brazil.

After test riding dozens of bikes, new and used - at people's homes, in bike shops, and several of the cities large dealerships - I settled on buying a new Honda 125cc Kickstart, who I named Lampião<sup>1</sup>. I ended up buying new because the used market was somewhat barren upon my arrival (towards the end of the summer, in February). Motorcycle sales go up during the dry, warm summer months that allow for the most pleasant riding, leaving few left towards the end of the season. An additional benefit of buying a new motorcycle was the added assurance that the bike was never stolen and had no outstanding tickets (traffic tickets in Brazil are attached to vehicles until they are paid, then appear as points on the driver's license). Finally, with my mind towards re-selling the bike at the end of the year, I found a new Honda to be the most practical option.

I decided to go with Honda because they do not lose much value once used. Honda has made few modifications to the motorcycles they have produced in Brazil since the 1970s (some of which are still running). For this reason, people know that a brand new or "zero"<sup>2</sup> Honda will run about the same as a model five years older, as long as it has not seen much abuse. In fact, a slightly used model might even be preferable as

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<sup>1</sup> A Northeastern folk hero who - together with his partner, Maria Bonita, and his band of cangaceiros - led a movement of social banditry in the early 20th century that challenged the hegemonic control of wealthy landowners in the Northeast. He was eventually cornered by volantes (police force) in the canyon at Rio São Francisco in Alagoas where he was killed, along with Maria Bonita and several cangaceiros.

<sup>2</sup> Referring to the initial reading of an odometer "000000.00"

things like the kickstart will be broken in (for which your shin will thank you)<sup>3</sup> and all of the bike's quirks will have come to the fore and adapted into daily riding practice. In other words, the motorcycles personality is more developed, creating conditions necessary for the dynamism between rider and bike demanded by effective riding practice.

I ended up paying about R\$6,000 *a vista*;<sup>4</sup> later selling the bike for around R\$4,500. Splitting the difference, over the course of my stay I paid roughly R\$160 (\$80 USD)/month for the motorcycle itself, plus around R\$100 (\$50 USD)/month in gasoline, which made my monthly transportation cost R\$260 (\$130 USD)/month - a figure about equivalent to what I would have spent on bus fare (and certainly a smaller amount when considering the occasional necessity of taking taxis). The motorcycle turned out to be a great financial decision that included the hidden bonus of teaching me more about the city than I could have learned any other way.

## **VEM PRA RUA** <sup>5</sup>

A few months into my time in Maceió the social outrage sparked by the looming World Cup, and the numerous atrocities being carried out in its name, began to manifest in the city. Various groups became energized by this national climate, to call attention to their own localized struggles. Following the #vemprarua ethos generated by the national protests, groups of demonstrators often congregated on the city's main boulevard:

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<sup>3</sup> A bike operated by kickstart involves a downward push on a lever that lifts out from the side of the bike near the pegs; literally kicking the lever down to get the engine to turn over and run. When a bike is new, this lever is stiff and loosens up a little with repetitive use. The stiffness of a new kickstart means that it might lock suddenly so that your foot slips off the lever, causing the rider's shin the crash into the footpeg at full force, which is unpleasant.

<sup>4</sup> "A vista" meaning paying all at once, rather than splitting the cost into payments. Most financial transactions in Brazil offer a discount for paying *a vista*.

<sup>5</sup> Author's Translation: "Take to the Streets"

Avenida Fernandes Lima, interrupting the flow of traffic, many times bringing it to a complete standstill.

Fernandes Lima is an infamous and integral stretch of asphalt in Maceió, connecting the upper part of the city (centers of commerce, middle and working class residential areas, airport, university, prison, military barracks, and hospitals) to the wealthy touristic area by the beach (hotels, high rise apartments, high end shops, Detran and Federal Police Headquarters, among other municipal buildings). The traffic of Fernandes Lima is so nefarious that the road is often given the moniker, INFernandes Lima, on social media sites (a play on the word “inferno” - which means “hell”). Because of its importance to the city - and in particular the city’s elite and regulatory bodies - as a thoroughfare of commerce and leisure, its disruption became a useful tool for protesters. I myself used the road every day to travel to the university and it soon became commonplace to find traffic in a dead stop or being radically re-routed by SMTT<sup>6</sup> and/or Military Police officers.

Each time I ran into a protest on my bike, the experience was different. The first, and most alarming, experience I had was on my way to the university one afternoon. Fernandes Lima is a broad avenue with three lanes going in each direction, separated by series of vegetated medians. So when I saw a car coming at me, full speed, down the wrong side of the road, in the middle of the day, it took me a moment to even comprehend what was happening. In that moment, the front bumpers of several more cars appeared on the horizon. All of the sudden a small fleet of cars was careening down the wrong side of the road. Everyone was honking and swerving and swearing. I pulled in the next outlet available on my left to make a u-turn, where a car was already waiting

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<sup>6</sup> Secretaria Municipal de Trânsito e Transporte (Municipal Secretariat of Traffic and Transportation)



to do the same. I rode up next to the driver's open window and asked what was going on. He said there were cops up ahead shooting at everybody and to get out of there, especially since I was *de moto*.

Later I learned the police were attempting to break up a protests by firing rubber bullets into the gathered crowd. The officers, however, had not been trained in their use: instead of firing the bullets at the ground to break momentum and limit the ricochet to below knee level, they were firing kill shots at people's necks and heads. Apparently the cars I came across had driven into the crossfire, panicked, and turned directly around.

\* \* \*

A different evening I was riding home from the university when I came across rows and rows of stopped cars. Since I was on my bike I was able to meander up to the source of the obstruction to find a barricade of taxi cabs spanning the avenue. I lifted my helmet so I could talk to some of the taxi drivers who appeared to be manning the line. I asked them what was going on and they explained that a comrade of theirs had recently been shot and killed while working one evening. They were hoping to draw attention to his homicide and the everyday violence they face in their line of work. When they finished explaining, one of them pointed at my bike asking, "A gente pode te ajudar?" I did not immediately get what he wanted to help me with. He read the confusion on my face and mimed lifting my bike up over the curb and pointing to the empty highway just beyond the barricade. I asked if they were sure that was ok and they all shrugged and nodded. Together we got the bike over the curb, through a patch of mud and grass, to the other side. I thanked them and took off with some trepidation about riding on the eerily empty highway. I did not ride alone for long, however, as I soon heard the familiar braaap of other motorcycle engines. Before long, I found myself riding among dozens of

motorcyclists spanned across all three lanes, though freely crisscrossing the dashed lines that marked them.

As I flew, I wondered why the taxi drivers had let all the motorcycles through. Perhaps just because it would be difficult to prevent such transgressions? But surely it would not be impossible to do so, not to mention that some of the drivers actively helped my bike across the barrier. Their means of protest was restricting mobility in the city, but clearly motorcyclists were precluded from such restriction, or at least not the targeted audience. Why not? What makes the motorcycles different? It was with these questions that I began to consider motorcycling, both as a local practice in Maceió, and as connected and responsive to global networks of power.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Having lived in Maceió for an extended period of time before conducting field work, not only allowed me these first glimpses into the compelling perspective of motorcycling in the city, but also gave me an extensive network of friends, colleagues, and acquaintances who helped me enormously in connecting with a variety of people to provide feedback for this project. The individuals I asked to contribute included several categories of motorcyclists: (1) those who ride for pleasure - in particular those organized as Motorcycle Clubs (M/C); (2) those who ride out of necessity or practicality - from the need for inexpensive and/or swift transportation; and (3) those who ride as a profession - mototaxi and motoboy (delivery) drivers and their organizing bodies. In addition, I also sought out the perspectives of several individuals, not necessarily motorcyclists themselves, but significantly related to the practice, including: motorcycle passengers as well as police and health authorities.

A second important resource for me in this undertaking was social media. Over the past few years, Brazil has gained a relative degree of fame for the ubiquitous use of social media throughout the country, and Facebook in particular (also referred to as “Face”). Though my own physical social networks in the city were geographically and socially diverse, allowing me to easily meet and engage in discussion with a variety of motorcyclists from the latter two categories above outlined; I found the members of M/Cs only at the periphery of these networks. I had many friends offer to take me to their neighborhood mototaxi post or their tio’s Moto Peça<sup>7</sup> shop, but I got many a shrugged shoulder when I asked about the clubs.

Occasionally, folks would mention the weekly meet-up the clubs had at the beach, but no one really seemed sure of the best way for me to make an introduction. I scoped out the event one evening and quickly understood that it would be a space difficult to engage, without a motorcycle of my own. Having sold my bike the previous year, I resigned myself to sitting on the wall running along the beach and framing the event. Next to me sat a group of teenagers who had gathered for presumably the same reason: curious about what was happening, but aware they did not have the necessary key (a motorcycle) to enter that space.

Determined to find an appropriate way to introduce myself, I turned to the internet to see what I could find. I soon discovered an online directory of M/Cs and contact emails that clearly had been neglected for some time. I attempted to send an introductory letter using a handful of emails from the list, all of which were returned with an error message. It was then that I turned to Facebook, with small ambitions of success.

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<sup>7</sup> Motorcycle Repair/Parts Store

To my surprise, however, it became an invaluable resource in my research. Through Facebook I was able to “friend” a number of Motorcycle Clubs and send out messages explaining who I was and what I was trying to accomplish. The added benefit of Facebook (when compared with email, or even in person introductions) is that these clubs were able to see my profile, my pictures, my posts, and my affiliations from the anonymous distance of the internet before agreeing to talk to me. These transparent introductions, and the high level of scrutiny to which they may be subjected, eventually led to my reception by the M/Cs and their sanctioning my presence at M/C events.

Finally, Facebook helped me maintain contact with my field site throughout the writing process, which has continued to inform and shape the contents of the final written presentation of findings. Though all interviews were conducted while in the field, my membership in several public Facebook groups has provided me with an active feed of videos and commentary throughout the city: from the backs of bikes, the inside of cars, and the mobile phones of civilians. My membership in these groups was initially incidental and social, but I have found it impossible to neglect addressing the intentional value of such posts, which reflect daily mechanisms of mobility, violence, and control in the city. The main groups from which I draw include: Trânsito Maceió, Feicibuqui di Pobre, Motofilmadores de Maceió, and Maceió da Depressão.

### **“I NEED YOUR CLOTHES, YOUR BOOTS, AND YOUR MOTORCYCLE”<sup>8</sup>**

A cyborg exists when two kinds of boundaries are simultaneously problematic: 1) that between animals (or other organisms) and humans, and 2) that between self-controlled, self-governing machines (automatons) and organisms, especially

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<sup>8</sup> Cameron, James (1991). *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*.

humans (models of autonomy). The cyborg is the figure born of the interface of automaton and autonomy.

- Donna Haraway (1989), *Primate Visions*, p. 139

In 1983, Brazilian rock band, Os Paralamas do Sucesso released their first album, *Cinema Mudo*, featuring the track “Vital e Sua Moto” (“Vital and His Motorcycle”). The song is about their drummer, Vital, who bought a motorcycle because he found walking and taking the bus insufferable. The refrain of the song goes, “Vital passou a se sentir total/Com seu sonho de metal” (“Vital felt complete/With his metal dream”). Though the song describes the Cyborg-Vital amalgam of motorcycle and human as a “união feliz” (“happy union”), it also speaks to the tensions this union causes; the first verse mentions his father’s misgivings about Vital buying a motorcycle, “Conselho do seu pai: ‘Motocicleta é perigoso, Vital/É duro de negar, mas isto dói bem mais em mim” (“His father’s advice: ‘Motorcycles are dangerous, Vital/It’s hard to deny, though it pains me”).

Vital’s departure from his father’s advice presents an attempt to deny this fact. Not by saying that one faces no danger on a motorcycle, but through the significance of the unity created between rider and bike. It is a union that accepts the existence of danger and develops tactics to confront it. These negotiations reveal that the motorcycle itself cannot be the source of danger, but instead a *reaction* to and *reflection* of the surfeit of danger to which the motorcyclist is exposed.

Looking at motorcycles helps re-imagine how we look at danger and risk. This perspective identifies the differences between being risky and being vulnerable to risks, between being dangerous and being vulnerable to dangers. These are important distinctions to make as they reveal the classist, racist, and gendered hierarchies that measure and describe daily interaction and therefore influence the way those interactions

take place and the effects they yield. The motorcycle-cyborg brings these distinctions to the fore.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Haraway's cyborg allows for an initial situation of the motorcycle and motorcyclist, and also provides a helpful discursive tool to aid in the description of their juncture. As any mechanic will tell you, however, one wrench will rarely do the job. For this reason I will be pulling from my toolbox a variety of allen, ratchet, tube, and socket wrenches as I work (with the occasional affective kick when the engine stalls).

To help describe how motorcyclists are pre-inscribed with death, Achille Mbembe's necropolitical framework, drawing from his descriptive terms "death-worlds" and the "living dead" who occupy them. Deleuze and Guattari's theorizations of rhizomatic relations among assemblages and nomads, with a particular emphasis on the distinctions they draw between "war machines" and the State will aid in the explanation of ways motorcycle-cyborgs push back against hegemonic road infrastructure to create space. Additionally, their discussion of smooth and striated space will help engage and build upon De Certeau's discussion of the Inert (Space) and the Mobile (Place) in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. In looking at specific motorcycle practice and organization amongst various circuits of motorcycle clubs and coalitions of mototaxi and delivery drivers, I will draw from Chatterjee's thoughts on organizing from outside the law in *The Politics of the Governed*; as well as Appadurai's concept of "Deep Democracy" in his exploration of social practice in the city, as it contends with State organization.

Using these frames, this thesis aims to explore the presumption and inscription of motorcycles and their riders as inherently dangerous or threatening actors in order to

answer the deceptively simple question: why are motorcycles considered hazardous? It seeks to expose the fact motorcycling is not considered a perilous undertaking because many people have lost their lives while riding them. They are “dangerous” because they threaten to expose the true culprits of the disproportional amount of motorcyclist road casualties and fatalities, the same culprits responsible for myriad articulations of violence throughout the world. Though masked in discourse and statistics that invent prejudiced terms like “motorcycle accidents”, a thorough investigation brings up the usual suspects: hegemonic State power, neoliberal capitalism, and the legacies of colonialism. These are forces to dismantle, rather than reinforcing their power by normalizing the very real structural and physical violence suffered daily by motorcyclists.

## **Chapter 1: Necromoto**

A cyborg body is not innocent; it was not born in a garden; it does not seek unitary identity and so generate antagonistic dualisms without end (or until the world ends); it takes irony for granted. One is too few, and two is only one possibility.

- Donna Haraway (1991), *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, p. 326

The relationship between rider and motorcycle is vastly different from that between the modern automobile and its typical operator; this difference is what makes the motorcycle-cyborg a particularly strong ground for analysis. As Haraway writes above, the cyborg body “takes irony for granted.” Ironic idiosyncrasies make up the practice of motorcycling and most often require a corresponding bodily dialogue between rider and bike. For example, one basic motorcycling tactic is called counterbalancing the bike,

employed during low speed turns. When going around a curve, it may seem natural to lean into the curve, however, this is not necessarily wise. Taking a curve at normal speeds, one can maintain center of gravity by remaining square with the handlebars, but a low speed turn requires a compensatory body positioning by the rider to avoid a fall. When turning at slow speeds, the rider must shift their weight to the *opposite* side of the bike, from the direction in which the bike is turning. Though this may seem counterintuitive, the mutual conditioning of motorcycle and rider turns this into a natural reaction, and takes this ironic form of intuition for granted.

In Brazil, this intuition becomes an indispensable mechanism of a motorcyclist's survival. Like most countries in the world, Brazil allows for the practice of lane splitting, which simply means that motorcycles are permitted to occupy the space in between automobiles and other large vehicles on the road.<sup>9</sup> In theory, motorcycles are only supposed to enter this space when traffic is at a complete stop, so they can meander towards the front. This theory, however, neglects to posit what happens when traffic begins to move again. The practice consists of high speed and seeming chaos, informed by a healthy dose of irony.

For example, every day a motorcyclist in Maceió will end up riding alongside a bus (not a lane over, but cheek to cheek). Inevitably the trajectory of these two vehicles will reach a point of contestation: the road will narrow pushing a move to single file, the two will arrive at a roundabout requiring instant calculation about who must pull ahead, or any number of obstacles may appear in the vehicles' path demanding immediate negotiation. In this situation, the motorcyclist must decide to accelerate and overtake the Goliath of an iron cage currently whipping up the wind singing through their neck hairs,

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<sup>9</sup> The U.S. is the only country that strictly prohibits the practice, with the exclusion of California.



or yield to the apparent dominance of such a vehicle by applying the brakes. A Maceionse motorcycle-cyborg always chooses the first option, because that is the only choice that leads to survival. It may seem ironic, but in Maceió motorcycles must be driven aggressively, must continually defy the structures of the road and those intended to dominate them, or else get caught under the ever turning wheels of hegemonic power.

## **TRAFFIC**

Traffic is not a monolithic unit, but an assemblage of vehicles that constantly maintain the tensions of mobility, affecting one another's trajectory through space. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write of assemblages, "as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification. Comparative rates of flow on these lines produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary acceleration and rupture" (p. 4). These rates of flow run every day through the streets of Maceió appearing as traffic jams, collisions, and the particles that sift through the cracks.

Deleuze and Guattari continue to describe two aspects of a "machinic assemblage" that is, the "organism," in contest with the "body without organs" that opposes it. On the road, the organism includes: (1) intact structures of the road (smooth pavement); (2) the space of marked lanes and the vehicles for whom they were drawn (insured, licensed, and undamaged automobiles); (3) police and other bodies of surveillance (digital velocity checkpoints, cameras, etc.). The body without organs consists of all the other road matter that does not organize according to the logic of the organism: (1) broken structures of the road (potholes, fading paint, graffitied signs); (2) unassigned or prohibited road space (the paint that marks the lanes, shoulders, sidewalks,

etc.); (3) bodies to be surveilled and regulated, and in particular, those defiant of surveillance and regulation. In the interaction between organism and body without organs Deleuze and Guattari write that the latter is “continually dismantling the organism, causing asignifying particles or pure intensities to pass or circulate, and attributing to itself subjects that it leaves with nothing more than a name as the trace of an intensity” (p. 4). This project attempts to trace this intensity, riding against the road-organism with the motorcycle-cyborg.

## **URBAN ENGINES**

In her discussion of transformations and contestations of urban space in the context of State urban “revitalization” projects in Bahia, Keisha-Khan Perry (2013) writes that “The rapid transformation in urban development is designed to enhance the interests of traditional elite groups and the nouveaux riches, while the poor black majority of the population is forgotten. This process of forgetting is essential to the social construction of the city, creating in essence two cities, a ‘visible city as much as an invisible city’ (Serra 2002, 17). The two cities of Salvador -created by elite white architects, engineers, developers, and builders and marked by race and class-struggle to coexist” (p. 36). These processes do not just invade and construct the inert spaces of the city, however, but are also at work on the road. On Brazil’s roads and highways ride highly visible automobiles, generally piloted by the white and wealthy, who consciously and unconsciously sustain daily structures of violence against invisibilized motorcycles and their typically non-white, low-income riders.

## TRANSMISSION

In an earlier article Perry (2004) writes, “City redevelopment programmes exclude blacks and relocate them to the distant periphery of new urban spaces. Growing gentrification ‘transforms’ cities but also deepens racial and class divisions by spatially demarcating the socioeconomic boundaries of racially ordered spaces” (p. 813). Again, this type of gentrification is at work on Brazil’s roads, through the automation of vehicles and the numerous implications this automation carries.

Though both automobiles and motorcycles can be generative of cyborgs, this increasing automation of cars serves to reaffirm boundaries between technology and human, thus mitigating the productive tensions highlighted by the cyborg, and detaching these mobile bodies from the spaces through which they move. The modern automobile increasingly eliminates the necessity of cyborg intuition, prioritizing instead an aloof homeostasis through automation that privileges those who can afford it. These innovations focus on automation over engagement, comfort over awareness, and convenience over understanding. Examples include: automatic transmission; power windows, locks & steering; air conditioning & heating; navigation & entertainment systems; even putative safety attributes like rearview cameras & auto-stop features. All of these are representative of anxiety about “organless” technology and its origins. It shows a subconscious refusal by the modern automobile operator to engage with these arenas and therefore risk complicating the borders between human and technology. In Brazil, these technological buffers become distinct markers of class. Only the most elite of Maceió own automobiles with such luxuries as automatic transmission, not to mention the myriad “safety” and entertainment features mentioned above.

Two wheeled motor vehicles, to the contrary, are considered lower-class transport in Maceió, and throughout Brazil. These vehicles lack most technology buffers found in

automobiles and almost exclusively have manual transmissions (with the exception of some scooters). The two main reasons for this tendency: (1) Cost/Repairability - it's much easier and less expensive to fix or replace a manual transmission. This is because an automatic transmission has all the parts of a manual transmission, plus the additional ones that perform work no longer undertaken by the human operator; and requires interfacing with the computer that serves as buffer between operator and machine. (2) Safety/Maneuverability - a manual transmission allows the competent vehicle operator to make minor adjustments in order to safely navigate fluctuating road conditions.

The former is often an important consideration for many motorcyclists, while the latter is almost certainly a chief concern for all, and significant to this analysis. Motorcycles face many infrastructural disadvantages on roads and in traffic, whose design is not principally meant to accommodate them. Manual transmission allows the rider to engage more directly with the vehicle, and by extension, the road, furnishing the operator with a modicum of additional control. The (extra)sensory input that a manual transmission communicates to the rider, informs their reaction to shifting circumstances and allows for different reactions to take place. It is productive of cyborg intuition. These facts are significant when considering the class, race, and gender based determinants of the type of transportation with which Brazilians choose, or are compelled, to engage.

## **TUBES**

In "The Aesthetics of Superfluity" Mbembe (2004) looks at the spatial production of the city, examining the example of Johannesburg through its history of violence, apartheid, and the racist governance of space. He argues that the city was founded

around the creation of a class of “superfluous men” (mainly migrant black workers) who did “superfluous work” (digging in the mines) that undermined the use value of black labor (pp. 379-80). The subsequent structure of space in the city was shaped by policies instituted by the apartheid state to create a “relationship between spatial patterns and moral order” (p. 386). This resulted in what Mbembe terms a “Disjunctive Inclusion” of the black community that created both proximity and distance, a paradox which causes city-spaces to be “tubular” with several realities coexisting and creating cracks in the city space. He argues for a recognition of this tubularity; to understand urban space not as a fixed and restricted unit, but as a shifting landscape bearing the scars of history.

Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome may help shed some light on this tubularity. Alongside assemblages and the body without organs, the authors also present the rhizome. They write “A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles. A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive...There is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language within a political multiplicity” (1987, p. 7). The tubularity recognized by Mbembe and the tuber by Deleuze and Guattari both push for similar understandings of the cityspace, and, particular to this study, the road. This project recognizes the road as one such a semiotic chain, dominated by State and elite discourse, which contains within it a multiplicity of interactions that these dominant voices try to subordinate and control.

In this context, Brazil’s highways can be seen as scars borne by the nation that recall the lasting cuts of colonization upon the land itself, which continue to affect the regulatory logic of movement and how the violence of the road is understood. As Perry (2004) writes, “Development in Bahia represents the renewal of a colonial past for both

‘the colonialist visitor’ and the ‘colonized host’, reflecting the physical and spatial remnants of racial oppression. Ultimately, transforming historical sites in black urban communities into exclusive areas for white middle-class leisure and recreation offers little benefit for the local population that has produced that culture, moreover, causing alienation, exploitation and marginalization” (p. 818). The roads in Brazil were clearly created for and intended to serve a white elite, which designates motorcycles as usurpers of the social order. By exposing roads as colonial scars, it becomes possible to position motorcycles on the roads upon which they ride, and reveal the origins of their marginalization.

#### **BANDEIRANTE**

In his history of the automobile industry in Brazil, Joel Wolfe (2010) sheds some light on the formation of highways in Brazil. He explains, “The majority of interior roads had been fashioned over existing paths slave hunters (*bandeirantes*) had created in the colonial era and early nineteenth century” (pp. 33-4). He continues to describe how the first Brazilian automobile operators saw themselves as an iteration of this form in the modern context. He writes, “In the twentieth century, Brazilians recast as pioneers the men who had chased runaway slaves...now literally pathbreakers who opened Brazil’s interior to settlement...They considered themselves modern *bandeirantes* who would use cars and trucks to explore and settle the interior” (p. 36).

The language that these early automobile drivers chose to invoke is significant. Using the name *bandeirante* explicitly acknowledges a role in carrying forward the colonial project and its formations of power. Their “pathbreaking” shackles the land in road systems that can only serve a hegemonic elite in the context of these structures. The

19th and 20th century connections that the *bandeirante* forms between automobiles, highways, and the nation are critical to understanding the relationship of any alternative methods of transportation (in this case, motorcycles) to the State; to normative vehicles (automobiles); and to the transportation systems that automobiles produced in collusion with colonial systems of power.

The *bandeirante* idiom remained connected to automobiles in later years, during Brazil's military dictatorship. Between 1964-1985 the Brazilian government maintained a center of investigation focused on suppressing left-wing resistance. The regime gave this organization the name, Operação Bandeirante (OBAN), financed by a number of institutions that notably included Ford & General Motors (Gomes 2006). Such legacies have continued beyond its fall, however; for example, in 1968 Toyota began its first automobile production outside of Japan by establishing Toyota do Brasil. Up until 2001 they were still producing iterations of this same model they first released in 1968 under the name Toyota Bandeirante (Toyota 2012).

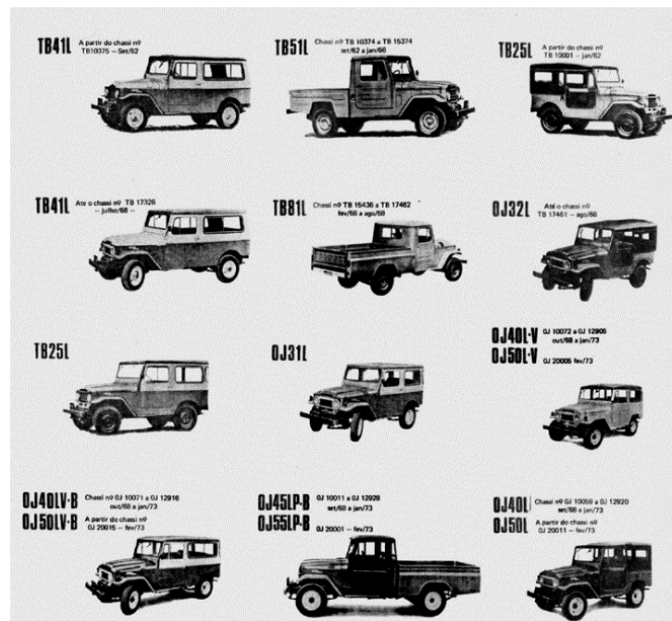


Illustration 1.1: Toyota Bandeirante, 1962-73 <sup>10</sup>

## MIGUEL

Miguel grew up during Brazil's dictatorship in São Paulo state, where he rode many motorcycles, something he still practices daily in Maceió where he now lives. A friend from my previous time in Brazil, Miguel works as a Delegado at the Policia Federal by day and teaches law (in which he holds a degree) at a private university by night. We became friends, or - in his words "partners in crime" - after he helped me register my temporary resident visa at the Policia Federal. He gave me a ride to the station on his bike and I asked him if he thought it would be practical to get a bike while I

<sup>10</sup> Image Source: Toyota ([http://www.toyota-global.com/company/history\\_of\\_toyota/75years/text/taking\\_on\\_the\\_automotive\\_business/chapter2/section9/item3\\_a.html](http://www.toyota-global.com/company/history_of_toyota/75years/text/taking_on_the_automotive_business/chapter2/section9/item3_a.html))



was there. He agreed that it would be, then took me to look at dozens of bikes and helped me navigate the bureaucratic labyrinth to a CNH.<sup>11</sup>

Aside from the fact that he is a trusted friend, I sought him out for information about the State governance of motorcycles for several reasons: (1) as a motorcyclist himself he is empathetic to the struggle, (2) as a motorcycle enthusiast he is extremely knowledgeable about their history, (3) as a thoughtful human being he is conscious of the power structures at play, and (4) as a high ranking Federal Police official he furnishes a unique glimpse from within these structures.

I knew these things from my previous time in Maceió when he gave me a crash course on motorcycle safety in the city. His first lesson to me was how not to get shot, warning me of both police and thieves. He explained that the popularity of my bike made it a target for theft. He said to me, “You must learn to run on your bike.” He explained that if ever I felt like two people on a bike were following me a little too carefully, I was to perform whatever maneuvers necessary to put space between us. In Maceió (and most of Brazil), the strategy for stealing motorcycles is for two up on a motorcycle to ride alongside another motorcyclist, pull a gun, and demand the bike. Should I ever find myself in this position, Miguel advised me to immediately yield the bike, but that it was better to avoid the situation altogether. In such a tense transaction, tempers run high, and accidents happen.

Miguel also explained, however, that police present an equally lethal threat to a person on my type of motorcycle. In the case of the police, Miguel advised me to be equally vigilant in looking out for them as for potential thieves. If the police ever appeared to signal me in the remotest fashion, he instructed me to immediately pull over,

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<sup>11</sup> CNH: Carteira Nacional de Habilitação (Driver License)

stop, make my hands visible, and await instruction. The reason for this, he explained, is that the Polícia Militar tend to, “Shoot first, and check if you’re white later.”

## **MAKING MOTORCYCLES**

Over the course of my fieldwork, I sat down with Miguel for a coffee to gain his insight; first discussing the industrial course of motorcycles in Brazil. He explained that the two most prominent motorcycle manufacturers in Brazil were Honda and Yamaha who began production in the early to mid-1970s (1976 & 1974 respectively by his estimate). Honda’s first bike was a 125cc while Yamaha produced a smaller 50cc, with Honda dominating 80-90% of the market. At the time, federal law prohibited the importation of goods that could be manufactured locally, which led to the prominence of these two companies. Both Yamaha and Honda manufactured their bikes within Brazil. He explained this law came from the 1975 oil crisis, which had left Brazil with an enormous national debt. Harley Davidson briefly had a plant in Manaus (he estimates 1977-78) and BMW tried something similar; they were able to operate through a loophole because 80% of the bike was made in Brazil, but both were eventually closed down with a tightening of the restrictions.

Eventually, Honda and Yamaha both moved on to the production of bikes larger than their original models: Honda - 150cc, 250cc, 350cc, 450cc & 750cc; Yamaha - 125 cc, 180cc, 200cc & 600cc (circa 1992). However, the smaller models still remain most popular for price and maneuverability. There has also been a broadening of the market recently in terms of brands (Miguel speculated that there is even a Triumph dealership in the South), but Honda still remains dominant.



Illustration 1.2: Honda 125 Advertisement, 1970s <sup>12</sup>

## CODING TRAFFIC

Miguel explained that with the improvement of the economy, people with enough income began to buy cars in the early 90s. He said that the traffic code, laid down in 1997<sup>13</sup> (replacing a previous set from 1966<sup>14</sup>) developed in this climate, which perceived motorcycles as:

1. Low class transport
2. Driven by aggressive males

<sup>12</sup> Image Source: Julio Cezar Kronabauer's Blog  
([http://jckronbauer.blogspot.com/2009\\_02\\_01\\_archive.html](http://jckronbauer.blogspot.com/2009_02_01_archive.html))

<sup>13</sup> *Código de Trânsito Brasileiro*. Lei No. 9.503, de 23 Setembro de 1997.

<sup>14</sup> *Código de Trânsito Brasileiro*. Lei No. 5.108, de 21 de Setembro 1966.

The code attempted to control these two factors. To enforce this control, he explained, most traffic violations are punished by fines rather than incarceration. He feels the major flaw of the system is that police do not physically stop those in violation, but rather take note of the license plate and mail the fine to their address, which may arrive up to a month after the violation occurs. As a result, many cannot even remember committing their alleged offense and therefore do not connect wrongdoing and punishment. He feels it would be better - in terms of actually curbing traffic violations - to stop and issue citations. Not to mention, I would add, only those for whom money and social capital are scarce will be deterred by a fine. Additionally, depending on the race and class of the driver (and vehicle) people *will* be physically stopped (as will be addressed shortly).

While I lived in Maceió, I had first-hand experience with receiving a traffic citation. My crime was riding with the visor up on my helmet, which I found absurd. I asked Miguel why the police are so strict about this law. He frankly answered, “I suspect it’s because we don’t like motorcyclists very much and want to make their lives difficult.” He elaborated that, for example, no law exists regarding having car windows rolled down, which is a comparable offense. The punishment for riding with your visor up was just over R\$400 (\$200 USD), or over half of the monthly minimum wage in Brazil.

## **RUNNING BLITZ**

The police perform several types of physical interventions in traffic: (1) the “blitz” within the city (mainly carried out to catch drunk drivers) and (2) the police checkpoints usually set up to control traffic leaving and entering the city.

In my time in Maceió I had noticed that many people have an app that shows where blitz’s are taking place in real time on any given night. I asked Miguel somewhat sheepishly about the app, but again found myself taken aback by his frank response. He smiled and said, “Everybody has it, I have it” and held up his phone. He explained that even the police who run the checkpoints use the app, which also shows traffic flow. When the police notice a change in traffic veering from their location, they move and re-establish the blitz in a place with heavier traffic, which he says is a very easy thing to do.

Miguel said another instance in which the police may use a blitz is when they are made aware that a fugitive of the law (ex. drug trafficker) is expected to pass through town. On these occasions police usually have some identifying information on the suspect and may run a blitz simply to slow down traffic flow enough so that they may be easily spotted. He said, however, they have to be careful not to slow it too much or their mark may become wise to the intervention and find a different route through town.

I asked Miguel about the checkpoints that are often in place to verify documentation of those entering and leaving town. When I lived here last year Miguel accompanied me on many rides up and down the coast. I was invariably stopped each time we passed through these checkpoints, while Miguel was always given free passage (although there was nothing that would immediately identify him as an officer of the law). I also noticed that cars were stopped very infrequently. I asked him why this was so and what sort of profiling occurs at these checkpoints.

He explained that first of all my physical appearance from my bike (with boots, jacket, gloves and helmet) prevented me from being identified as a white woman, the only giveaway being my braid poking out from the bottom of my helmet. He said my build - average height and “skinny” - marks me as a poor (and presumably black) Brazilian man. He explained that once I stopped and removed my helmet, they saw that I was a *galega*, and therefore was not frisked (which I would have been were I male, particularly a black male). When I rode with him, he would always turn around at the checkpoints to show his badge and explain I was with him, and suddenly I would no longer need to present documentation at all.

He then continued by saying my other problem was that I rode a “cheap bike, wearing cheap clothes” (low-cylinder bike, jeans, work boots, t-shirt, imitation leather jacket). He, on the other hand, rides a massive (and expensive) BMW Adventurbike R1200GS with all the appropriate gear and a matching helmet. This, he said, demonstrated he was the owner of the bike, while I had all the trappings of a thief. He said the police are especially vigilant about two up on smaller bikes.

## **SPLITTING LANES**

As we finished our second or third espresso, Miguel told me about two young women from the U.S. to whom he had provided assistance in registering at the Federal Police, upon their arrival in the city. He laughed as he explained how they asked him if, as a police officer, he did not ride between cars because it is “illegal.” He clarified for them that it is not, however, he now explained to me, he does try to follow certain guidelines in order to ride more safely. He told me that the British government has produced some informational videos on the practice that they call “filtering” and

recommended I check them out as he feels they are helpful in explaining how to perform it safely. It was my turn to laugh though, because I have followed Miguel through traffic many times in Maceió, and I doubt Her Majesty would approve of some of the manoeuvres he pulls off.

## **RECONCILIATION**

On the road, the reconciliation of two vehicles often leaves the motorcyclist in a debt that is not only physical, but also symbolic. Motorcyclists, due to their exposure, experience much more severe injuries when a collision occurs, as compared with their counterparts who are protected by steel cages. This asymmetrical fallout has engendered the term “motorcycle accident” where the most injured party by extension also becomes the most culpable. What is casually identified as a “motorcycle accident,” however, most commonly occurs when an automobile strikes a motorcyclist while making a left-hand turn. Generally, the automobile driver will claim that they did not see the bike - that the motorcyclist “came out of nowhere.” Such an explanation elicits eye rolls from motorcyclists, while frequently meets enthusiastic agreement from other automobile operators. The physical reconciliation, obviously, is a collision. To grapple with this paradox, I sought the testimony of those who had experienced such inequitable reconciliation first hand.

## **FABIANA**

Fabiana is a 34 year old woman who used to frequently ride on the back of her brother’s bike, and the bikes of other (male) friends, until she suffered a traumatizing accident on the back of her friend Rodrigo’s bike. The accident happened at around

8:00p one night while she and Rodrigo had been stopped at a light. A drunk driver struck them while careening up the street “contra mão”.

Fabiana and Rodrigo were both thrown from the bike and both lost their helmets upon impact. Fabiana said when she first got to her feet she immediately felt her face to check for damage because she had lost feeling. She was relieved when she drew away her hand with no traces of blood. She did, however, have a piece of glass lodged in her knee - an injury that she says still pains her to this day. She had also lost her purse and cell phone in the fall, which were promptly stolen by bystanders.

After checking her face was intact, she went to check on her friend, Rodrigo, who had suffered worse injury than her. She said the skin and fat from the left side of his chest was completely hanging off (she said it was his fat that saved him) and his bottom lip was also severed and hanging limp - both his chest and lip had been cut on the glass from the car. The drunk driver fled down the road, though Fabiana said he was chased down by the car he had struck before he hit them. Fabiana said he later came to apologize to Rodrigo and pay the cost of his wrecked bike. Fabiana gave Rodrigo her blouse to staunch the bleeding on his chest and called her sister. Ironically, her sister had passed by them shortly after the accident had happened, seeing the fallout, but unaware that Fabiana was involved. Fabiana said that she has been terrified to get on a motorcycle since and only will in cases of extreme need. For example, she might take a mototaxi if she is very late for an appointment.

I asked her if she knew others who had suffered accidents on motorcycles. She said she had a cousin, brother, and friend who had all been in accidents. Two had been hit by cars and one had driven into an open car door (the driver had opened his door in the middle of the road while stopped in traffic). She said that she feels people really do not have respect for motorcycles on the road.



We then discussed her views on health care here, which she feels is insufficient. She said she moved to Maceió about 30 years ago and there hasn't been a new hospital built in her whole time here (though some smaller clinics have opened). She feels this is shameful as wait times in the public hospitals are very long. She told me about a friend of hers, for example, who had fallen off a ladder, breaking several bones. She said he was in the hospital for 27 days without treatment and left with one leg shorter than the other.

I asked her why she feels then, with all these dangers and problems, there continues to be a great number of people on motorcycles. She cited three main reasons:

1. Price: she says a new bike costs around R\$180/month, while a [basic] new car is around R\$400-500/month + cost of gasoline
2. Work Opportunity: Mototaxi & Motoboy
3. Joy/Enjoyment of Riding

I then asked her why she feels that although there are many motorbikes here, there is only a small minority piloted by women. She said one of the reasons she never really cared to ride a motorcycle is because she felt she could not take the weight of it. She also said that women fear speed, which is why most of the women who do ride here, ride smaller scooters, rather than motorcycles.

She said, however, that her hometown of Arapiraca has many more motorcycles than Maceió and there is much greater balance of gender among those who ride. She explained that it is simply part of the culture there so both boys and girls learn to ride while growing up. She explained that the town developed around motorcycles in

particular through the practice of “consórcio” which is less common in present day. In a consórcio, people would pay a fixed amount each month as a member of a larger group. Every month there would be a lottery and one to several members of the group would get a motorcycle (though they would continue to make payments until the consórcio had finished and each group member had received their motorcycle)

We closed by discussing her ideas about improving traffic safety. She feels that traffic is one of the greatest killers/dangers in Brazil. She thinks that one way to improve would be to mix the theory and practical aspects of traffic school. She said that when studying for a license, you first take a theory course, then undergo the practical training. She explained that by the time people arrive at the practical portion, they have long forgotten the theory and do not apply it, and therefore it never transitions to the actual road.

Fabiana says she remains terrified of the traffic in Maceió and especially fears for every motorcyclist that passes her. She gets around mainly by car, which her husband drives. She worries, however, about his desire to purchase a motorcycle.

## **GILMAR**

Gilmar is a young man (mid-late 20s) who has ridden a motorcycle for about 3 1/2 years. He currently rides a 150cc Suzuki, which he upgraded from a Honda Titã (150cc) because it has 6 gears instead of 5. He says he rides a motorcycle because it lowers his commute time (from 20 minutes to about 5-8 minutes). He holds two jobs and says that he would be perpetually late if he drove a car (or worse, rode the bus) instead.

He confessed to me that he does not have a license (neither car nor motorcycle). The reason for this, he said, is partly because of the cost of getting a license and partly

because of the simple hassle. He laughed at my astonishment at this confession. He said that many people here drive without a license. He explained that the minimum salary here is R\$700/month and the cost of a license is about R\$700 so many people cannot fit it into their budgets. This, of course, is in addition to the cost of traffic school, which is between R\$800-1000 and requires some degree of literacy for the theory portions.

I asked him if he worried about driving unlicensed, and again he laughed. He said he had been stopped by the police on two occasions and had no problems. He explained that once he was friends with the officer who stopped him so he let him pass without question. On the other occasion he was able to bribe the officer with R\$35. He said he'd rather pay R\$35 every once in a while, than pay for the cost and aggravation of getting a license. He said that you do not need a license to purchase a bike, just identification/CPF.

I then asked him about safety issues. He showed me a mean looking scar running up his wrist and said he had suffered one accident. He was going around a curve in the rain and lost control. He fell but only received minor injuries - no broken bones, internal bleeding, head trauma, etc. - just some superficial cuts, the worst of which gave him the scar on his wrist. He thinks the greatest problem on the road is “falta de sinalização” (absence of traffic lights, signs, etc.) He said he feels not very many women ride motorcycles because they are afraid. Motorcycles for him mean liberty.

#### **FEARING LIBERTY, LIBERATING FEAR**

What I found striking about Fabiana and Gilmar's stories, was a gendered line I often heard when justifying riding, or abstinence from, motorcycles. The male motorcyclists that I asked to explain their choice to ride a motorcycle, in addition to

practical justifications, often responded with some gesture at a joyful liberty afforded by the practice. Throughout two months of fieldwork, and the previous year of living and riding in Maceió, I met very few female motorcyclists. I would often ask women (and men) to help me understand why there are so few female riders. This is a critical puzzle, and I am extremely dissatisfied with the explanation that motorcycling breeds a sexist culture, or worse still, that women are less capable of managing a bike (due to size, skill, etc.). The response I often got to this question, whether spoken by a male or female voice was that women are afraid (of speed, weight, etc.). Hearing these responses time and again I began to realize that like the mythical “motorcycle accident” this gendered understanding of motorcycle practice does not flow from the practice of motorcycling, but from attempts to regulate it from the outside.

Drawing upon Deleuze and Guattari’s terms once more, motorcycle-cyborgs are “war machines” that function in opposition to the State. Within the State, “functioning is structural” while war machines function by “insertion or situation” (1987, p. 353). In the State, there exists “institutionalized, regulated, coded war, with a front, a rear, battle” while war machines “go to war without battle lines, with neither confrontation nor retreat, without battles” (p. 353). This is why a male motorcyclist will hardly bat an eyelash when he sees a female enter the fray; taking only a moment to acknowledge the appearance of another iteration of fellow warrior, joining the battle without needing to cross any lines. In the eyes of the State, and its associated pathways of regulation, this becomes a transgression, an affront, to be feared and discouraged.

While living in Maceió, I sometimes saw the quick double take male motorcyclists would perform as I rode into their field of vision, but I have yet to encounter a male motorcyclist who discouraged me from riding. I did receive a lot of gendered feedback about my decision to ride, just not from other bikers. The most vocal

advisors in this matter sometimes offered their views with the greatest intentions. For example, concerned mothers who imagined their daughter in my position. These women are aware of systematic threats ever-present in a woman's life that are heightened by her gender position, and prefer a frightened, living child to a tranquil, sleeping one. This perspective comes from that arcane knowledge, mother's intuition. It provides an intimate understanding of white patriarchal power over her life and by extension those of her children, that she has no need to explain. I have great respect for this perspective. Other voices I heard with less gravity.

The bodies these voices came from were almost universally white, wealthy, and male. Sometimes, in the evenings, I stepped off my bike to go for a drink with friends. We would meet up to walk or take a bus to one of our preferred choparias.<sup>15</sup> In these venues, I was treated to any number of rants by flashily dressed men, twirling their car keys at me, as they explained how much safer life would be on four wheels, *especiall*y since I was a "menina."<sup>16</sup>

When I first purchased my motorcycle in Maceió, the majority of salesmen at the large dealerships had trouble understanding I wanted to see the *motorcycles*. Though Miguel, an authoritative male, often introduced me and my interest in a motorcycle, I was inevitably shown between one and three scooters before the representative would believe that it was *really* a motorcycle I wanted to buy. The salesman who eventually won my business steered me straight to the last Honda Kickstart 125cc motorcycle they had in stock, without question or delay. After we closed the deal, he wheeled it out to where Miguel was waiting for me on the street with his own bike. As he passed me the reins, the salesman confessed to me sheepishly that his boss was a little annoyed with him. He

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<sup>15</sup> Bar, generally principally selling draft beer

<sup>16</sup> "Little Girl"

had given me such a good deal that the dealership had only broken even. He said he did not mind though, that he was happy to see me riding, and congratulated me on my incredible luck that not only did I manage to get the last bike in stock, but that it was black too. He grinned and said to me in English, “Black is beautiful. Boa viagem!”

## Chapter 2: Contramoto

Mbembe’s term “necropower” describes how sovereignty is expressed by power over death, rather than simple regulation of life. In “Necropolitics” he writes:

I have put forward the notion of necropolitics and necropower to account for the various ways in which, in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*. (p. 40)

*Os Paralamas do Sucesso* identify the weapons of actors in the Brazilian city in their 1986 song “Selvagem” (“Wild”) which interrogates questions of control and power in the city (and was released in the wake of the fall of Brazil’s military regime, after more than twenty years of rule). The four verses of the song outline the weapons of four groups.

The first two verses illustrate armaments of the police and the government, which constitute death-worlds. The police, they assert, have physical power: transparent shields, batons, and shiny helmets coupled with “A determinação de manter tudo em seu lugar” (“the determination to keep everything in its place”). The government has the power of symbolic violence: reticent discourse and inconsistent innovations through which “a liberdade cai pa terra” (“liberty falls to the ground”).

The second two verses describe the limited arsenal of the living dead (the city and black folks) as they negotiate these death-worlds. They claim the weapons of the city as “kids at traffic signals and beggars on the corner” whose only power is “o espanto...nos olhos do quem vê o grande monstro a se criar” (“the surprise in the eyes of the beholder as they watch the great monster grow”). Black folks, they say, have marked backs, calloused hands and “a esperteza que só tem quem tá cansado de apanhar” (“the wits possessed only by someone who is tired of taking beatings”).

The way *Paralamas* define the weapons of the powerful and disenfranchised in relation to one another provides a compelling perspective on tactics of resistance from within the death-world. Most notable here is that the weapons they attribute to the living dead (children in poverty, homeless men and women, and the marks of oppression inscribed upon the black body in pain) are in fact wounds inflicted by death-worlds (physical violence from police, structural and symbolic violence from the State). Though these may be far less potent weapons, *Os Paralamas* here show an attempt to recognize what value they have for reflecting State violence back upon itself and at least provoke surprise or embarrassment amongst elite actors for the problems they create and the lethality of their actions.

## **HOSPITAL GERAL DO ESTADO**

State powers of regulation, however, cannot be underestimated in the context of the strict life or death stakes of necropower. In Maceió, these stakes run especially high at the Hospital Geral do Estado (General State Hospitals) or HGE. Having established death-worlds, hospitals (especially public hospitals) provide the State with systematized, clinical pathways where many walk from a social death to a mortal one.

Though Maceió houses several private clinics, which cater to the elite of the city, many more Maceioenses become subject to the HGE's long wait times, overflowing hospital rooms, and limited ability to foster the sanitation standards necessary to prevent the spread of infection among patients. This form of subjugation is not only classed, however, but expresses one of many forms of structural racism that operate throughout Brazil. An overwhelming majority of Maceió's low income population is Afro-descendent, who by virtue of economic status are also in turn the greatest victims of the liminal ability of the HGE's medical staff to actually improve the health of their patients. Oftentimes, the structural neglect of the HGEs (by the State that established them) actually creates conditions for swift drops in the health of patients.

Especially alarming about Maceió's HGE is the lack of orthopedic surgeon. From the ethnographic data I collected, I learned that motorcyclist victims of traffic collisions generally maintain a strong presence in HGE emergency rooms (often as much as half or more). One of the most common injuries in such a crash is a broken bone. Though the HGE in Maceió is able to accommodate simple fractures, the severe break of large bones - like the femur - are more difficult to repair and often require surgery. For this reason, many patients must be transferred to hospitals in other cities. En route, their wound becomes exposed to the risk of mortification, meaning that upon arrival at a hospital with the appropriate surgeon, setting the bone may no longer save the now infected limb, so the doctor must amputate instead.

## **DELEON**

Deleon works in Maceió's HGE as a nurse. He says that they see motorcyclist victims everyday, though they always increase on weekends and holidays. The spike



begins around 6:00p on Friday and grows during the early hours of Saturday morning, again spiking in the early hours of Sunday and he says many come in with the smell of alcohol. Stipulating, however, “Num carro se você bebe e dirige, vai machucar outra pessoa. De moto só vai machucar si mesmo.”<sup>17</sup>

Late at night (especially on the weekends), motorcyclists’ exposure also leaves them vulnerable to assault, so many will run red lights to avoid this fate. It is, of course, a choice between the lesser of two evils: risk being caught in cross traffic or risk being caught in crossfire.

In general, the casualties of collision are of young, between 23-24, though some are minors (>18 years). Though it is not permitted in Brazil for people under the age of 18 to pilot a motorcycle (or a car), it remains permitted to ride a 50cc motorbike without a license, with no requirement for safety gear (i.e. helmets). Deleon also said that riders of these smaller bikes often make modifications to them (remove mirrors, lower suspension, etc.), which do not always work in harmony with the logic of the roads. Other common victims that he has seen are families. He said that often lower income families purchase motorcycles as a family vehicle (because of the cost) and ride with the whole family on board.

He also sees thieves and sometimes escaped prisoners in the hospitals after accident. In these cases, they have to follow careful procedures. “Eles sofrem o mais,” he said with some sadness. His comment, in Mbembe’s terms, revealed his understanding of the interpellation of these individuals as living dead in several death-worlds simultaneously: as a motorcyclist on the road, as a low-priority and high-security public hospital patient, as a prisoner of the State inside prison walls (and a fugitive on the

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<sup>17</sup> Author’s Translation: “In a car if you drink and drive, you are going to hurt someone else. On a motorcycle you are only going to hurt yourself.”

outside), and, as is often the case, a criminalized black or brown body subject to systematized income inequality and heightened State surveillance.

## **TRIAGE**

HGE gives priority to young people. When a victim comes in, they go to triage to assess the basic severity of the accident, then are sorted into a ward based on the injury they have suffered: Azul, Verde, Amarelo and Vermelho (Grave). There is also the UTI (Unidade de Terapia Intensiva) for those that need immediate attention and ALA “F” for neurological trauma. Although they try to work as efficiently as possible, he said that everyone always has to wait, generally at least a morning or afternoon. The types of injuries he has seen range in severity from fatalities, people put on respirators, spine and head trauma, broken bones, and burns. The most severe ones generally resulting from riding without protection. He says often the first thing people say when they come in is that they will never ride a motorcycle again.

## **COLLISION**

As far as the accidents themselves, he said that the vast majority are between motorcycles and cars, though he has also seen collisions with animals. He said that accidents always increase when there is rain. Some road hazards that increase the chance of collision that he mentioned are potholes and also speed bumps. He also discussed the danger that kites pose to motorbikes. A common pastime in Maceió is kite fighting. People attach pieces of glass to kites and attempt to cut the strings of their opponents. The problem is that children often stage these fights alongside the road. When the kites stray to the street they can become wrapped around motorcyclists (generally around the

neck) and cause them to crash. There is a device available to help mitigate this problem - a rod you can attach to the front of the bike with a hook at the top that can cut the kite string. However, not everyone purchases this device and kites still pose a great problem.

In addition to drunk driving, Deleon said some other dangerous vehicle operator practices lead to accidents. Although motorists here are (in theory) accustomed to the practice of lane splitting, and therefore checking their mirrors for motorcyclists, many still find themselves unaware and hit a bike as they are changing lanes.

When they cannot make space on the roads, motorcyclists sometimes also mount the sidewalks, which can pose a danger to pedestrians as well as motorcyclists themselves. Deleon recounted an incident from a recent evening walk home. A motorcycle came up on the sidewalk where he was walking and clipped a parked motorcycle as he passed. The mirror flew off the parked motorcycle and struck him in the head. Although he was not severely injured, he was shaken, and explained that it could have been much worse.

As we closed the interview he mentioned he used to ride a motorcycle, but sold it after starting work at the HGE and seeing the fallout. He explained that, in the end, “os acidentes dependem dos outros, não de você.”<sup>18</sup>

### **SHIFTING ACCOUNTABILITY FROM NEUTRAL TO FIRST**

The rise in popularity of GoPro cameras, especially among motorcyclists, has led to widespread documentation, and divulgation on Facebook and other social media networks, of the dangers motorcyclists face from automobiles. These videos call out the dangers automobiles pose to motorcyclists, unconsciously or not, through their practices.

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<sup>18</sup> Author's Translation: “Accidents depend on others, not on yourself”

They point to the ways that automobiles frequently close off the corridor in which motorcyclists ride (Motofilmadores de Maceió, November 27, 2014) and the critical importance of using a turn signal when switching lanes (Trânsito Maceió, December 6, 2014). They also provide critiques of those who complain about why motorcyclists use this corridor and how it also benefits automobiles in ways their drivers generally remain unconscious of, as shown in the image below (Trânsito Maceió, December 7, 2014). These are all provocations about the privilege of driving an automobile that denounce the violence expressed in their behaviors towards motorcyclists.



Illustration 2.1: “They complain about the corridor, but what would become of them without it?”<sup>19</sup>

One of the pioneers of this genre, Kleber Atalla, began his career as “motofilmador” because of the muffler shop he owned in São Paulo. He discovered the GoPro helmet camera could be a powerful tool for advertising his mufflers, if he could provide his viewers with a wild enough ride. He initially launched his video series “Kleber Atalla Escapes” through his YouTube channel, KLE621FULL, which is still in full operation, as well as a website where viewers can purchase his products (Atalla Escapes), and a Facebook fan page (Kleber Atalla Escapes).

Though the videos are mainly advertising propaganda, they also contain social critique in the stream of curse words he shouts over the roar of his motor, often calling out imprudent drivers for their transgressions. The popular appeal of his videos also lies in his continual defiance of traffic regulation, and the stack of traffic citations he has earned as a result, which are almost as numerous as his YouTube views. His popularity has earned him the affectionate nickname “Tiozão.” In São Paulo, he is now so well-known that his videos now often feature cameos from random pedestrians and other road travelers, who recognize “Tiozão” and hail him with greetings, flashes of thumbs up, and sometimes even party invitations. They call to him because the signature sound of his motor is a battle cry of a war machine, taunting the State, defying it to regulate him.

### **MACEIÓ DA DEPRESSÃO**

Video sharing, to provoke discussion and promote accountability, has developed into a popular form to comment on various injustices in the city, not only in

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<sup>19</sup> Image Source: Facebook. Author’s Translation

motorcycling, but in the range of interactions that transpire each day. The most extreme naturally tend to reach highest circulation, inciting the more contentious and aggressive comment feeds.

*Maceió da Depressão* (literally *Depressing Maceió*) is a Facebook page that makes political commentary on the problems in Maceió, often using dark humor, but sometimes by providing earnest documentation of what actually happens throughout the city. The most common themes of the page concern issues with traffic, crime and violence, how they compound with one another, and how they relate to race, class, and gender.

Recently, the site posted a video of a group of wealthy young men, referred to by the vernacular term *playboys*, driving around in a car apparently looking for a victim to rob for sheer entertainment in Maceió's wealthiest neighborhood, Ponta Verde. The boys spot a man (many years their senior, but clearly from a much more modest income bracket and with a darker complexion) and pull over so one boy can exit the vehicle where he proceeds to shout at the man to lie on the ground and surrender his belongings. The boy begins to yell at him to give up his cell phone, though the man apparently does not own one. The boy continues to violently pat down the blindsided man lying facedown on the sidewalk, but when he cannot find a cell phone he eventually contents himself with taking the drawstring bag the man had been carrying and leaves him lying on the sidewalk.

This cowardly and inhumane appropriation by Maceió's elite, of a real culture of violence that most adversely affects Maceió's poor, shows a violence that operates at many levels. First of all, the actual act of violence itself: humiliation, trauma, and theft at the hands of bored (and purportedly intoxicated) rich, young, white men solely for the

sake of their amusement. The repellant apparent lack of humanity involved in such an act is nauseating at its most basic level.

This appropriation, however, also reveals a type of symbolic violence that resonates beyond this individual incident. While mocking violence in the city, because of their social position, their brutality also apes behaviors of police surveillance (recalling Fassin's analysis of "stop and frisk" from earlier). Not only will the young *playboys* face no negative repercussions for their violent, criminal, and cruel behavior, but they will be rewarded through the self and mutual affirmation gained in this re-articulated display of white male heteronormative power. Meanwhile, the man they attacked not only must contend with the psychologically and physically traumatic ramifications of the encounter; but in the moment of attack, his assailants put him in an immediately dangerous position in the gaze of the State solely by virtue of their race and social standing.

If the police were to interrupt the attack by the *playboys*, for example, they would assess the situation based on measurement standards of the State. The culturally illogical nature of an interaction between a vehicle-less man dressed in shorts and *chinelas*<sup>20</sup> and the *playboys* in a car, creates an overt disjuncture in State logic that, by nature of the police's function, they would be compelled to address. On the road, this man is to be surveilled by the State; the *playboys*, as holders of significant capital, are to be protected. With this gaze, a passing patrol car would see the man as threat, though he was victim. A stark example of the way cultural appropriation becomes a tool to leverage power within a system of measurement that has infinite contingent strategies to protect the privileged and perpetuate the marginalization of those excluded.

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<sup>20</sup> Flip Flops

Neither the man or the *playboys* embodied any sort of inherent social form before the *playboys* attacked; their interaction, entangled in societal power relations, created (or, in this case, reified) social form. If, hypothetically, this incident had ended with State interference, the arrival of policemen would again trigger a shift in the position and momentum of attackers and victim.

### SHIFTING INTO SECOND GEAR

These attempts at enforcing accountability are a good start, but are clearly *only* a start to the challenge mounted against the relegation of motorcyclists to a *death-world*. This type of marginalization is especially harsh for the *mototaxi* and *motoboy* (motorcycle delivery) drivers whose profession is governed by official federal guidelines, but often unregulated and unsupported at municipal and state levels. I turned to Miguel again for an explanation of why this is so.

Miguel explained that currently there is a rough division of motorcycles into two categories: small bikes (50cc, 125cc & 150cc) and large bikes (250cc & above). He said in general, those with small bikes have them for practical purposes and are usually their only means of transportation while those with large bikes (like him) usually also own a car and ride for pleasure. He said, however, he has noticed an emerging potential for a third, mid-range category (250-300cc). He explained that there is a growing trend for motorcycle professionals (motoboys/taxis) to invest in these slightly larger bikes. The reason, he asserted, for this is twofold: (1) They are better, more powerful bikes and (2) This helps them to avoid the prejudice associated with smaller bikes.

I asked him to shed some light on the laws governing motoboys and mototaxis. He explained that to work as a motoboy (officially) you must go through courses and



become licensed to become a commercial driver (as with taxis, commercial trucks, etc.) He said mototaxis are technically illegal in the state of Alagoas, though regulated by individual municipalities. He said their services are especially vital to smaller towns in the state where their cost is low (usually R\$2-3 a trip). I have noticed a number of mototaxis operating in Maceió and that they do not take many pains to disguise themselves (in fact, the majority wear neon shirts with MOTOTAXI in black letters across the front). I asked whether the police here ever interfered with their work. Miguel said very infrequently. Occasionally they may seize a bike and impound it, but generally there is a great outcry against it, so the police generally do not interfere. He said, however, that mototaxistas usually take pains to set up posts away from central areas to avoid this problem.

I asked him why the profession remains officially illegal when, in practice, it continues - for the most part - unhampered. He said the state retains this law on the books so as to relieve themselves of responsibility in the case of an accident. He explained that mototaxis are risky because of the unpredictable factor of the passenger. Not everyone knows how to be a safe and courteous motorcycle passenger, which is a constant and unknowable risk.

#### **WHEN ACCOUNTABILITY STALLS**

One article from the major Brazilian newspaper, *O Globo*, discusses the challenges faced by this disconnect, highlighting the difficulties faced when attempting to mandate levels of training and protective gear, particularly when the State is reluctant to support the cost of such measures, which often falls on the drivers themselves (De Oliveira, February 2, 2013). The article contains an interview with Marcelo Rosa de

Rezende, himself a motorcyclist, who serves as an orthopedic surgeon in the Hospital dos Clínicas in São Paulo.

Rezende argues in favor of the State funding these precautionary measures, but he provides a vexed justification as to why it should support the costs of protective equipment and training for motorcyclists. He explains “Um paciente internado aqui na Ortopedia custa, em média, R\$40 mil. Ele costuma passar 18 dias aqui, o que é uma média muito alta. São várias cirurgias, muitas vezes vários dias de UTI. O custo, no fim, é muito maior do que oferecer curso gratuito para todos”<sup>21</sup>

Rezende makes a logical argument that merits consideration, but it contains within it dangerous implications about the lives of motorcyclists. What he does not highlight here is the cost upon people’s bodies, which should be foregrounded in these discussions. His argument is sadly revealing of the fact that breaking down the monetary cost of something is a more convincing argument to the State, than protecting the physical integrity of its citizens.

Earlier in the article, Rezende describes his advocacy for these courses and defensive driving techniques in general “Ando de moto há 30 anos, nunca sofri um acidente...Por isso acredito muito na direção defensiva, no motociclista bem informado, instruído. Não faço apologia do uso de moto, ali se está mais exposto, mas, sabendo disso, me protejo mais.”<sup>22</sup> I strongly agree with Rezende’s advocacy of such practices, but I would caution him again as to the tone of such discourse. It is dangerous and foolish to make arguments that you, as a motorcyclist, have never crashed due to the

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<sup>21</sup> Author’s Translation: A patient interned here in Orthopedics costs, about, R\$40,000. He will usually pass 18 days here, which is a pretty high average. There are various surgeries, many times various days in the ICU. The cost, in the end is much greater than offering a course free to all.

<sup>22</sup> Author’s Translation: I have ridden a motorcycle for 30 years, I have never had an accident...For this reason I really believe in defensive driving, in the well-informed motorcyclist, instructed. I don’t make any excuses for the use of a motorcycle, there you are more exposed, but, knowing this, I protect myself more

superiority of your technique and therefore will never crash. Most bikers are familiar with the old adage “There are two types of motorcyclists, those who have been down and those who are going down.” Rezende would do well to remember this. The purpose of such a phrase is to remind all motorcyclists that no matter how safely and carefully you ride, there is a structural violence built into these roads that touches us all eventually.

Rezende himself reveals that the most trauma he sees in his motorcyclist patients is to the legs. Why? “têm mais contato com os carros” (“it comes into the *most contact with cars*”). So the majority of injuries that befall motorcyclists could be prevented if they did not have contact with cars, rather than if they did not ride a motorcycle. Motorcycles having zero contact with cars, of course, is an infeasible proposal; however, it remains important to foreground this pathological reality when looking at these accidents. With such recognition, it becomes possible to begin to deconstruct the normative attitude that positions motorcyclists always at fault; evidenced in even such basic ways as the presumptive term “motorcycle” accident. The real dangers augured by such an attitude can be seen in a recent altercation between a *motoboy* and a truck driver in Minas Gerais - an exchange of words that ended with the truck driver running over the motorcyclist and crushing him under his wheels. The driver is currently being held by police for homicide, but maintains that he simply did not see the motorcyclist because he was in his blind spot (O Globo, December 5, 2014).

So, while Dr. Rezende’s breakdown is helpful, it must be further qualified by a recognition of the power automobiles and other large vehicles will always hold over motorcyclists regardless of protective gear, training, and personal responsibility. Automobile drivers too, must be held accountable for motorcyclists’ lives so that motorists like this one, who commit blatant homicide, will never be able to use such outrageous arguments in an attempt to defend their actions. The argument should not

only be that on the road we are weaker, so we need to be more aware, but also, on the road you are stronger, so you need to be more aware.

## **JAIRAM**

Jairam works as a motoboy at a Chinese fast food restaurant in Maceió. He has been working at the restaurant for about a year, though he has worked as a motoboy for more than three. He originally bought his motorcycle as transportation for another job, but decided that he could earn better as a motoboy. He admitted to me that the profession has its risks, however, chief among them the structural disadvantages of motorcyclists on the road. “Somos mais fracos” he said to me “então temos que ficar mais alertos.”<sup>23</sup> Jairam felt most trouble he encounters on the road comes from cars, though he conceded that some motorcyclists behave with equal imprudence. Conversely, he says sometimes automobiles treat him with respect, explaining “Pode perceber quando motorista tem moto também.”<sup>24</sup> He told me he had been in one collision on his bike, when a car boxed him out while taking a curve, forcing him to crash. He ended up in the hospital for two days, but said he was well attended because a friend of his worked there.

Despite the accident, Jairam expressed feeling secure on the road, because he feels supported by the other motorcyclists, and in particular other motoboys. He said if one motoboy falls on the road, others will gather around to help. In extreme cases, he said sometimes they will even physically fight the driver of the car that struck them. I do not doubt him.

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<sup>23</sup> Author’s Translation: “We are weaker, so we have to be more aware”

<sup>24</sup> Author’s Translation: “You can tell when a (car) driver also has a motorcycle.”

### **ACCOUNTABILITY IN THIRD GEAR**

A video from São Paulo has been circulating amongst various motorcyclists (and others) in Brazil on social media (Loucos por Motos, April 15, 2015). The video depicts an incident of motoboy solidarity exactly as Jairam described. At the beginning of the 6 minute 22 second video, a motorcyclist is presumably struck by a car, marked by the squealing tires recorded by another motorcyclist's helmet camera. Hearing the screech the moto-cameraman halts and turns to face the source of the disruption, conferring with another rider stopped on a scooter, to understand what transpired.

Meanwhile the driver of the car at fault begins an attempt to flee the scene, though he is confronted with an almost solid wall of automobile traffic. He makes a bid to escape by driving in between the lanes of cars (as a motorcycle would), but is pursued by a growing fleet of motorcyclists. Eventually the assembled motorcyclists manage to halt the man's flight and bait him out of his vehicle. After an exchange of words, one motorcyclist begins to physically attack the driver, who responds by pulling out his mobile phone to film him. Initially deterred by the driver's act, he soon regains his composure and renews the attack, quickly aided by yet another motorcyclist. The motorcyclists manage to prevent the driver's escape long enough for the police to arrive (without doing the driver any great injury).

Not all traffic altercations happen when support from comrades is so readily available to a motorcyclist. Somberly illustrating this fact is the recent assassination of a motoboy following a traffic dispute in Maceió. The victim, 42 year old Arivaldo Souza de Nascimento was struck by an automobile on the evening of 17 April 2015. Immediately following the incident, Nascimento engaged in a verbal discussion with the driver, which ended when one of the car's passengers suddenly pulled a gun and fired three times, killing him instantly (Alagoas 24 Horas, April 18, 2015). Sobering realities

like this emphasize the high stakes of motorcycling and stress the importance of the work to create networks of safety among motorcyclists.

### **ED SAMPAIO**

Ed Sampaio is the President of the organization that regulates and supports the mototaxistas, motofretes, and motoboys in the state of Alagoas (SIMEAL).<sup>25</sup> At the time of my fieldwork, he was running to be a Deputado in the State of Alagoas. His goal for his candidacy was to unite the motorcycling community and, if elected, provide representation to motorcyclists in government. He hoped to push forward legislation that will improve the health, safety, and general well-being of motorcyclists in the state. He told me that although the current governor of Alagoas is a motorcyclist, but he has done little in the way of providing actual support.

Discussing problems of health care following motorcycle accidents, he estimated that in any given hospital waiting room, around 6 in every 10 patients will be there with motorcycle related injury. He also explained that there is a lack of expertise in Maceió's hospitals to deal with the injuries that arise from motorcycle accidents, citing as an example the previously mentioned dearth of orthopedic surgeons to repair severe fractures.

In terms of riding practice, Ed felt the main threat to physical integrity is lack of education about conscientious riding. The majority of people are not taught to ride well or safely and therefore run greater risks on the road. He explained that he himself has been riding for 20+ years without accident, but then some people leave the shop and have

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<sup>25</sup> SIMEAL: Sindicato dos Motociclistas do Estado de Alagoas

an accident just down the road. He said “Motocicletas não são máquinas à matar, se fossem, todas as lojas seriam fechadas.”<sup>26</sup>

He explained that a second issue for motorcycles is a lack of infrastructural support. He said that though there are laws to enforce safety gear being worn by motorcyclists, the state does not provide corresponding safety in the structure of roads. He cited as some examples a lack of traffic lights and well paved roads (many potholes). He also explained that though people should be riding bikes in good condition, there is a general lack of motorcycle parking. This means that motorcycles must squeeze in between cars or on sidewalks when parked, where they are susceptible to damage.

A third major safety issue that he noted was the problem of drunk driving. He said an especially great, and under recognized, problem is drunk driving during the day. He said it is a custom for many to have some cachaça with lunch and then return to work, putting many drunk drivers on the road. Although there is the “Lei Seca” in Brazil, he explained it is mainly enforced at night via the blitz checkpoints. He said that the ones that exist during the day are mainly to verify documentation, rather than watch for drunk driving. He also mentioned how many people drink at the get together I attended on Friday, then drive home, which he finds dangerous.

### **MOTOTAXI, MOTOBOY, MOTOFRETE**

According to Ed Sampaio, the three main categories of two-wheeled professionals include:

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<sup>26</sup> Author’s Translation: “Motorcycles are not killing machines, if they were, all the (motorcycle) shops would be closed.”

1. *Mototaxi or Mototaxista*: transport people around the city (more prominent in the interior than big cities)
2. *Motoboy*: delivers goods around the city (food, water, documents, etc.) (more common in the city than interior)
3. *Motofrete*: basically same as motoboy, but makes long distance deliveries

He said one of the gravest consequences among those employed by motorcycle who have accidents is they are often the sole breadwinner for their family. When an accident befalls them, they may be laid up for months, the family loses income, the children lose respect for their father, and their mother may seek a new partner to provide financial support.

One of Ed's ideas to promote greater financial security among the two-wheel professionals is to create a gasoline post specifically for motorcycles. By buying gasoline in bulk, motorcyclists can receive price cuts; additionally, he feels this would work well with other motorcycle components (tires/parts/etc.).

We closed discussing the recent law passed that raised the motorcyclist's income by 30% from R\$1000 to R\$1200/month. He gave me a magazine that contained a blurb about this and a photo of himself with Dilma and other leaders celebrating the inauguration of this law.

#### **ACCOUNTABILITY IN FOURTH GEAR**

Although the motoboys with whom I spoke said their employers were honoring this law, the mototaxi driver's income remains unregulated. This lack of regulation not



only fosters financial uncertainty, but also socially positions them in a way that ties their profession to illegality.

Chatterjee's *The Politics of the Governed* (2006) helps understand the impact of these policies with regard to the ways the motorcycle taxi and delivery drivers I worked with would organize to assert themselves politically. Despite their nominal illegality, these services remain crucial to the city and so endure as overt practice. In order to create an arena for asserting their rights, they have organized in a number of ways both locally and state-wide.



Illustration 2.2: Mototaxi Post outside Pátio Shopping (Shopping Mall), Benedito Bentes<sup>27</sup>

In particular, I found illuminating Chatterjee's discussion of the organizing efforts of the squatter settlements by the railway (pp. 56-60). He writes of these efforts, "There is thus an entire network of paralegal arrangements that can grow in order to deliver civic services and welfare benefits to population groups whose very habitation or livelihood

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<sup>27</sup> Photo by Author

lies on the other side of legality” (p. 56). The motorcyclists I worked with faced many challenges due to operating “on the other side of legality” and organize as a means to compensate for the lack of state support that they receive in facing these challenges. The largest of these organizations, of course, is SIMEAL, which is based in Maceió. Though SIMEAL is meant to serve the motorcyclists in their day-to-day struggles for things like healthcare, fair pay, safety, protection from police harassment, a lot of its energy ends up focused on creating a political visage to interface with state organizations rather than attending directly to these needs.

In addition to SIMEAL, however, there are numerous local groups of mototaxi drivers organized by neighborhood affiliation, which I feel practice a politics more similar to the type that Chatterjee describes. These groups are much less structured and often have a leader by consensus/seniority rather than formal voting structures. When I spoke with one of these groups they had many grievances with SIMEAL and found their own organizations more effective and attuned to their needs. Though unofficial, these groups usually have a membership fee and provide documentation of such membership to each driver. The drivers then are able to present this documentation to potential customers in order to show their legitimacy. This type of proof is so important because the illegality of their profession has constructed associations between mototaxi drivers and criminality. Through these neighborhood associations they are able to create a space to legitimately practice their profession within the community.

Chatterjee writes that one critical component of the politics of the governed was “to give to the empirical form of a population group the moral attributes of a community” (p. 57). Here he discusses how the residents of the rail colony came from many different places and backgrounds, but needed to find a point of moral cohesion in order to satisfy this requirement and enact this type of politics. Because the residents did not have any

obvious ethnic or class allegiances, they instead unified along terms of kinship, calling themselves a family. I found this helpful in understanding the disconnect between SIMEAL and the neighborhood mototaxi organizations. These affiliations of kinship are critical to the effectiveness of the neighborhood collectives. On the other hand, as SIMEAL becomes more integrated with state structures, it becomes less representative of the population group, and disconnected from community moral values. As Chatterjee explains “the strategic balance of political forces” is always subject to change and such a shift in equilibrium can be destabilizing to this type of politics (p. 60).

  
**AMMAL**  
Associação dos Moto-Taxistas de Maceió/AL.  
Sede: Rua A 11, Quadra A 11, nº 253b – Benedito Bentes - Maceió/AL  
CEP: 57.084-040 - Tel. (82) 8899-1417-CNPJ: 10.601.992/0001-66  
Fundada em 26/05/2008

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**CONTRATO DE PERMISSIONÁRIO**

A Associação dos Moto-taxistas de Maceió-AL, legalmente representada pelo Sr. Ramilson Cruz de França, brasileiro, casado, concede a permissão da praça de 1 (um) ano, após um ano passará a ser própria, de nº. 222, de propriedade do sócio

O Senhor(a) - Adriano  
Portador do RG nº. - \_\_\_\_\_  
CPF nº - \_\_\_\_\_ residente e domiciliado(a) a rua \_\_\_\_\_, declaro ainda que o valor negociado por uma taxa de inscrição do mesmo no valor de R\$ 1.000,00 (Mil reais) foram devidamente acertada conforme assinaturas abaixo.

Maceió/AL, 24 de Maio de 2011

Adriano Proprietário da permissão  
Ramilson Cruz de França - Presidente  
Samarita Testemunha 1  
João Testemunha 2

**CERTIDÃO**  
Certifico haver recebido e inscrito a seguinte licença com o valor que se há respondido, R\$ 1.000,00.  
15 JUL 2011  
Ramilson Cruz de França  
R. João de Montalvo 255-Centro  
RECONHEÇO A FIRMA DE SI  
RAMILSON CRUZ DE FRANÇA  
CPF: 000.000.000-00  
EM TESTEMUNHA DE VERDADE  
O TESTE ANTES DA PRIMA-PRE-PUBLICO  
CERTIFICA EM BARRA-SUBSTITUIÇÃO  
A. NATA E CELIA B. DA COSTA-ESC.  
FEITO PORTELADE DA LUZ  
RECEBIMENTO  
CARTELO EM OFÍCIO  
CARTELO EM OFÍCIO  
CARTELO EM OFÍCIO

### **BALANCING THE CLUTCH**

As previously mentioned, Ed Sampaio believes that there is a lack of unity among the motorcyclists, particularly the motoclubes. He says that many conduct themselves like football clubs, but he feels it's time to put egos aside and move forward. He thinks he is the person to do this, because he has had many years of experience working on and around motorcycles, which is why he has put forth his candidacy for Deputado. I admired his passion and commitment, but wondered about his dreams of a completely unified front of motorcyclists.

In Simone's "People as Infrastructure" (2004) he writes, "Urbanization conventionally denotes a thickening of the fields, an assemblage of increasingly heterogeneous elements into more complicated collectives" and poses the question "But does this mean that an experience of regularity and of sustained collaboration among heterogeneous actors is foreclosed?" (p. 208). He argues not, and goes on to discuss making visible the thickening of these structures in order to recognize the novel and infinite ways the "outcomes of collaborative work in the city" can interact with the "disposition of regularities." He describes this interaction as a paradoxical collaboration between "an experience of regularity" (in which people's lives are fixed into the cityscape) and the flexible or provisional actions and expressions of the residents themselves, arguing that the former "regularity" is only made possible by the corresponding fluid maneuvering of the residents. Simone terms this phenomenon

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<sup>28</sup> Photo by Author

“people as infrastructure,” which he examines as a generative process of remaking in the context of the inner city of Johannesburg, South Africa.

For the mototaxi drivers with whom I spoke, it was clear that any semblance of regulation they managed to achieve, arose from the fluid methods of neighborhood organization previously outlined. These shifting, and at times disjointed, assemblages of drivers negotiate with one another to create a space for mototaxis in a city hostile to their trade. Primarily, through these organizations, the drivers are able to gain territory for their posts. Their signs were often hand-made, hanging tenuously on a wall or tree branch, with the ephemeral presence of associated members, flowing in and out as they took fares. It was this flow of drivers, however, that clearly established the organizing ethos of the space. Their individual apparitions were fleeting, but the regularity of the assembled drivers created safe spaces for their comrades to catch a nap in between rides or stow their bikes as they waited for customers. Additionally, these assemblages also helped establish trust and rapport between the drivers and the community, who can rely on no official guidelines to determine mototaxi drivers to be legitimate or not.

### **EDILSON & JUNIOR**

I approached Edilson and Junior sitting on a bench near their small self-made mototaxi post. They had hung a banner reading “MOTOTAXI” upon some trees over their parked motorcycles. Junior was older than Edilson, having ridden for about 22 years. He has a car, a house, and a small family. He says his line of work allows him to provide a decent life for his family, although his wife also holds a job. He says he usually has between 15-20 customers a day and the average cost is around R\$20/trip.

Edilson has been in this line of work a shorter amount of time (around 3 years) and is currently looking to sell his bike and upgrade to a Honda 150cc.

When I asked about the dangers of their line of work, the first thing they mentioned was other motorists and cars in particular. Junior explained that he had been in one accident on his motorcycle. A car had hit him from the side and he jumped off and managed to escape with only minor injuries. Another danger they mentioned was thieves since mototaxistas deal in cash and exposure is greater on a bike than in a car, the risk of someone approaching and robbing them is greater. They both said that thankfully this had not yet happened to either of them.



Illustration 2.4: Edilson & Junior's Mototaxi Post behind Pavilhão de Artesanato, Ponta Verde <sup>29</sup>

A third danger that they outlined is that people come to them looking for drugs. They explained that this is a type of prejudice they have to confront in their line of work,

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<sup>29</sup> Photo by Author

because this is a reputation that mototaxistas hold. While explaining this, Junior said to me, “Olha só” [points to a group congregated behind some large concrete pipes] “fumando maconha - eu não sou contra - mas com a camisa de mototaxista...mancha nosso trabalho.” He also explained that there are people who wear a “MOTOTAXI” shirt in order to trick people, then assault and rob them. He explained that this again adds to the bad reputation of mototaxistas. He said this sort of thing is possible because of the technical illegality of mototaxis, so there is very little regulation and less support. He said, however, that people know to trust them because they have been around the same spot for a while. Their post was strategically tucked behind the Pavilhão do Artesanato (a tourist hotspot), as compared to the “Taxi Credenciado” (Automobile Taxi) post at the market’s front entrance.



Illustration 2.5: Taxi Credenciado Post in front of Pavilhão de Artesanato, Ponta Verde <sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Photo by Author

Returning to Deleuze and Guattari's terms, we can see clearly illustrated here the distinctions between war machines (mototaxis) and the State (Taxi Credenciado). Mototaxi posts are informal, often setting up shop in tucked away corners like this one, otherwise finding fares as they ride throughout the city. The Taxis Credenciados, however, operate from posts that strategically link the elite and touristic sites of the city (souvenir shops, airports, hotels, bars, etc.) or otherwise may be hailed by phone.

Using chess as a metaphor, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write, the State's project is one of "arranging a closed space for oneself, thus of going from one point to another, of occupying the maximum numbers of squares with the minimum number of pieces" (p. 353). War machines on the other hand, play with tactics of the ancient Chinese game "Go" with the aim of "arraying oneself in an open space, of holding space, of maintaining the possibility of springing up at any point: the movement is not from one point to another, but becomes perpetual, without aim or destination, without departure or arrival" (p. 353).

I asked about the benefits of this type of work. Both immediately said the freedom of it and the fact that they are their own boss. Junior compared the mototaxi, which is independent, to the motoboy, who works for a business, "[A motoboy] pode dormir com emprego e acordar desempregado, eu não." They also expressed that although they usually work roughly 11 hrs/day, that it is not tiring work.

Since Junior has a car, I asked him if he preferred driving it to riding his motorcycle. He immediately said no, that his car was just for weekends when he travels with his family, and that he loves riding his motorcycle, "Minha vida é de moto."



### Chapter 3: Biomoto

De Certeau (1984), speaking of rail travel in his *The Practice of Everyday Life*, writes “everything has its place in a gridwork. Only a rationalized cell travels. A bubble of panoptic and classifying power, a module of imprisonment that makes possible the production of an order, a closed and autonomous insularity - that is what can traverse space and make itself independent of local roots” (p. 111). In the thirty years since he wrote this, his thoughts on railroads have come to apply to automobiles as well.

Roads and highways are railways with imaginary tracks. These “tracks” are represented by the lane lines painted upon the concrete that composes them. Vehicles are expected to follow the logic of these lines as if vehicle and road were as rigidly cohered as train wheels are to rail tracks. The width of these lines speaks to who they are intended to accommodate – automobiles. Vehicles like motorcycles fit awkwardly into this space, which is why most motorcycling practice throughout the world involves transgressing these lines, filtering between the “closed and autonomous insularity” of cars and trucks – vehicles often literally sealed off from the space through which they pass, in contrast to the always entangled and exposed motorcycle-cyborg.

The way highways are imagined to work in the eyes of the law (i.e. the eyes of the State that favors the perspective of the automobile driver) involves an assumption of order based on the “closed and autonomous insularity” (of individual automobiles). The critical caveat that De Certeau provides, however, is that space is traversed “independent of local roots” - therefore any transgression in the traffic order is seen as an intrusion by outsiders upon the established system, rather than a reaction provoked by the

establishment of a system that created outsiders by excluding and/or criminalizing non-automobiles.

Therein lies the danger with roadways, as opposed to railways, that this analysis seeks to reveal. They titularly include other vehicles and organisms (pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists, trucks, and even animals and animal-powered vehicles) with the expectation that they will all comply to an automobiling model of autonomous movement. As De Certeau writes, “Assemblies no longer obey hierarchies of dogmatic orders; they are organized by the gridwork of technocratic discipline, a mute rationalization of *laissezfaire* individualism” (p. 113).

To understand these networks, De Certeau provides determinations for place and space, which he defines as: (1) Inert (Place) - “a determination through objects that are ultimately reducible to the *being there*”; and (2) Mobile (Space) - “a determination through *operation*...specify ‘spaces’ through the actions of historical subjects (p. 118). These determinations add to the framework for analysis here. The practice of motorcycling involves the negotiation and articulation of space and place at the interface of the mobile and the inert.

### **MOTOQUEIRO NÃO, SOU MOTOCICLISTA**

I came to know the M/C community through one club, Panteras M/C, who were the first to respond to the dozens of Facebook and email messages I sent out to clubs introducing myself and my research. In my initial email, I made the mistake of identifying myself as a *motoqueira* (as opposed to *motociclista*). These terms are used interchangeably by many motorcyclists in Brazil, but some have a strong preference for one or the other. In Maceió, the M/Cs all prefer *motociclista*, as *motoqueira/o* is often

used demeaningly by the city's elite. In his response, the club's communications chair, Medeiros, explained the tenor both words carry in Maceió. He made the following distinction:

Veja a diferença: O motoqueiro não tem compromisso com nada nem com ninguém, só pensa nele, não respeita as leis de trânsito, não tem amor a sua própria vida, independente da cilindrada de sua moto. O motociclista usa sua motocicleta para passear, viajar, e respeitar as leis de trânsito... Ser motociclista é levar o sorriso no rosto e amor no coração, é pregar a igualdade, irmandade, fraternidade, sinceridade, é rasgar o vento no peito, é cortar estradas, é respeitar o próximo, amar a vida, fazer novas amizades, saber colher sonhos e conquistar sua liberdade. Não importa a cilindrada de sua moto, o importante é que ele tem para oferecer e o que trás na sua bagagem. (personal communication, July 2, 2014).<sup>31</sup>



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<sup>31</sup> Author's Translation: "Look at the difference: A *motoqueiro* does not care about anything or anyone, he only thinks of himself, does not respect traffic laws, does not love his own life, independent of the amount of cylinders his motorcycle has. The *motociclista* uses his motorcycle to wander, travel, and respect the laws of traffic... To be a *motociclista* is to carry a smile on your face and love in your heart, to preach equality, brotherhood, fraternity, sincerity, to feel the pull of the wind on your chest, to cut through streets, to respect those proximal to you, to love life, to make new friends, to know how to harvest dreams and win liberty. The amount of cylinders of the motorcycle has does not matter, the important thing is what he has to offer or what he brings along."

Illustration 3.1: Sign posted on gate of high rise apartment in Ponta Verde: “Motoqueiro, remove your helmet please! Identify yourself to the doorman” <sup>32</sup>

Most notable here is the re-imagination of liberal ideals like liberty, autonomy, and the “laissezfaire individualism” De Certeau describes, often normatively associated with neoliberalism, capitalism, and isolation. Instead of imagining freedom and independence in this context, the motorcyclist instead considers the pursuit of an interactive *relationship* between self, machine, land, and other human beings (or organisms). The result of this in the M/C community of Maceió is an overt emphasis on rider responsibility, safety and community in their philosophies, at their gatherings, and in their on-the-road practice.

The rider networks they maintain help to ensure the freedom and independence of all by remaining connected. The most immediately visible example of this is the motorcycle cut that is the standard of most M/Cs in Brazil, and throughout the world. The motorcycle cut, patch, rockers, and flash<sup>33</sup> that are often perceived as symbols of wild rebellion, are in fact forms through which motorcyclists build community ties and enforce accountability among members.

For example, on both club shirts and cuts, blood type was written next to the member’s name, to help medical professionals assist them in the case of an accident. This not only is a highly practical precautionary measure, but also a subversive statement that denounces other motorists - as well as the physical, social and political infrastructure of the city - for the constant threat of violence that they pose to motorcyclists no matter how

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<sup>32</sup> Photo by Author

<sup>33</sup> Cut - vest, typically made of leather or blue jean, often worn by M/C members; Patch - center patch on back of cut that carries club crest; Rockers - patches above and below club patch that carry the name of club and chapter (city/state); Flash - any number of other patches on cut, can include rank, identifying information, accomplishments, and affiliations

responsibly they act. It is a subtle, though powerfully visceral and honest, attempt to create accountability and value for their lives in the community.

One M/C president told me how wearing a cut also helps ensure responsible riding in club members. By flying their club's flag on their back, they inscribe a set of ideological values upon their bodies that impact their interactions according to logic and measures established by their club. This, however, does not create some sort of impenetrable ideological shield around them.

Club members, for example, trade pins, patches, and stickers at events that they add to their cuts and motorcycles to represent friendship and solidarity with one another through a cooperative exchange of ideals. Panteras headquarters was also filled with trophies collected at events they have attended throughout Brazil, which creates a transgressive geography within its very walls. The clubs also participate with their friends and neighbors outside of the motorcycling realm through *Ações Sociais* (Social Actions) where they will help families and individuals from their community with things as quotidian as moving; to larger events like providing games, food and entertainment for a *Dia das Crianças* (Children's Day) celebration or helping with home construction and improvements.

### **NOMADS, TRIBES, AND CHIEFS**

To help understand the organization of the Motorcycle Clubs, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) furnish more useful terminology in their discussion of nomadic warriors, their chiefs and tribes, which constitute war machines. Though the M/Cs have hierarchical structures within the clubs (President, Vice President, etc.), the leadership roles take on a very different character than those of State officials. Discussing the chief,

Deleuze and Guattari write s/he “has no instituted weapon other than his prestige, no other means of persuasion, no other rule than his sense of the group’s desires” (p. 357). They argue that the ephemeral nature of the power of the chief, who only holds sway as long s/he remains reflective of community values. In reference to the nomadic warriors whose values the chief reflects, they write “the warrior himself is caught in a process of accumulating exploits leading him to solitude and a prestigious but powerless death” (p. 357).

As previously mentioned, Ed Sampaio was critical of this structure because of the minor disputes it may engender among the “warring” clubs. Deleuze and Guattari emphasize, however, that “war is what limits exchanges, maintains them in the framework of ‘alliances’; it is what prevents them from becoming a State factor, from fusing groups” (p. 357-8). What actually preserves the M/C community and allows them to maintain networks between their “tribes” are these small conflicts among clubs.

### **PANTERAS M/C**

The first time I met the integrantes of Panteras M/C in person was upon Medeiros’ invitation to their monthly meeting. The club president, Mauro, picked me up on his motorcycle to bring me to their meeting, which began at 7:30p (though we arrived late) and ended at about 9:30p, though most of the members stayed to hang out and chat until 11:00p or so.

The first order of business at the meeting was to discuss the departure date for an upcoming trip five members would be taking to Petrolina. There was an extensive debate as to whether they should leave on Friday or Thursday. Some wanted to leave on Thursday so they would have more time to ride and enjoy themselves, while others

preferred to leave on Friday because they had to work. Though they said they would prefer to ride together, they agreed that practicality may force them to split up.

Next, one member, Medeiros, spoke up about some recent drama in their “WhatsApp” group and expressed his concern that some members may have a problem with him. He invited anyone who did to speak up, but no one seemed to have anything to say. “Presta atenção, Kate...” Mauro said after Medeiros had spoken his piece, “para o seu clube...nunca se use WhatsApp!”<sup>34</sup> and everyone laughed.

Finally, Eduardo collected money from the group and made notations in their financial records. After this, the meeting broke into more casual conversations and Mauro invited me to ask questions of the group. The first thing I asked was how the group came to be. Everybody turned to Mauro (who seems to be the oldest member) for an answer, but even he didn’t seem to know the story. They explained to me that the group formed in 2002 and members entered on an invitation only basis. However, at this point, no original members remained and the club was in about its 4th generation. They currently have 18 members. They try to keep the club small in order to prevent too much drama. They also do not currently have any (independent)<sup>35</sup> female members. They explained that once they did, but she didn’t stay long and later bounced around a couple of clubs. They said it was just a personality clash.

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<sup>34</sup> Author’s Translation: “Pay attention, Kate...for your club...never use WhatsApp!”

<sup>35</sup> Independent female member here meaning a female who pilots her own motorcycle, rather than riding pillion with a male partner.



Illustration 3.2: Trophy Case in Panteras Club Headquarters <sup>36</sup>

Eduardo then gave me a tour of their headquarters, which doubles as a motorcycle shop. He showed me a large number of trophies that the club had received for attending different motorcycle events. He also showed me, with great pride, a trophy for being one of the top 10 motorcycle clubs in Alagoas. He said there are about 100, and they give awards to the the top 10, in no particular order so as not to breed too much competition/resentment. He also showed me the large sheets of glass on which they had adhered a number of stickers bearing the crests of many other motorcycle clubs. He explained that they trade stickers with other clubs at events.

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<sup>36</sup> Photo by Author





Illustration 3.3: Trophies and Stickers in Panteras Club Headquarters<sup>37</sup>

Neusvaldo, another member, explained to me the problems that sometimes arise in the group based on income and employment differences among members. He explained that this was the source of the debate at the beginning of the meeting, because each member has different resources to travel. He said that each does what he can though, and they usually sort it out without too much drama. This is the reason why they try to keep the club small.

Medeiros also took time to reiterate the difference between *motociclista* and *motoqueiro* (the distinction he had clarified for me in our Facebook correspondence). I asked if there was anyone who would self-identify as a *motoqueiro* and they said only those who would not know the difference. They said the clubs in Maceió all identify as *motociclista*. Though they say they find the term *motoqueiro* offensive, when confronted

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<sup>37</sup> Photo by Author

with it, they prefer to explain the offense (as they did with me) rather than get upset about it.

Before departing, we all took a picture together in front of their club banner, which they later posted to their Facebook page.

### **SMOOTH AND STRIATED SPACE**

Though De Certeau's distinction between the inert (place) and mobile (space) aids an understanding of the way motorcyclists make space in the places of the city, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) point to the fact that space has more than one iteration. They explain that the State "codes and decodes space" in the attempt to create the organized, regulated, delineated space, which they term "striated space" (p. 353). War machines, on the other hand, relate to space through processes of "territorializing or deterritorializing" creating "smooth space" that is fluid, without the rigid boundaries of striated space (p. 353).

In "Deep Democracy" Appadurai (2002) identifies contradictory forces constitutive of the city and its ambitions. He writes "One of the many paradoxes of democracy is that it is organized to function within the boundaries of the nation-state...to realize one or another image of the common or general will...Yet its values make sense only when they are conceived and deployed universally" (p. 45). I think Appadurai's recognition of the limits of rigid borders (of striated space) in creating inclusive democracy helps identify how local and translocal motorcycling practices operate in ways divergent from hegemonic transnational economic and social practices. Yet such divergence does not foreclose the opportunity to work in cooperation with institutional structures, drawing them away from the State into the smooth space of the war machines.

Appadurai points to the productive power of collaboration in deepening democracy, writing “Depth is also to be located in the fact that, where successful, the spread of this model produces poor communities able to engage in partnerships with more powerful agencies...what these horizontal movements produce is a series of *stronger* community-based partners for institutional agencies charged with realizing inclusive democracy and poverty reduction” (p. 46). That is, the ability of local social structures to provide for a more equitable distribution of expansive and broader-reaching ones.

This type of collaboration is evidenced among the motorcycling community by the ways that SIMEAL works in concert with the Federação de Moto Clubes e Moto Grupos do Estado de Alagoas (FMCMGEA)<sup>38</sup> as well as the local motorcycle dealership, Atlântica Motos, and a number of independent vendors to put on a weekly motorcycle rally in the city. The event takes place in these sort of bourgeois ruins in the city - a space adjacent to the decrepit structure of the former IATE Clube (Yacht Club) - also called Alagoinhas<sup>39</sup> - built by and for the military and other elite of Maceió that is now crumbling into the sea. The motorcyclists and various other groups have reclaimed this part of the city in various ways to create public space for themselves.

### ALAGOINHAS

In “Theses on Urbanization” Neil Brenner poses the question “Is there an urban process?” and argues that this process is the “structural product of social practices and political strategies,” which houses the simultaneous capitalist creative destruction of urban landscapes and a struggle for the local commons (p. 104, 110). The example of

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<sup>38</sup> The Federation of Motorcycle Clubs and Motorcycle Groups in the State of Alagoas

<sup>39</sup> Little Alagoas

Alagoinhas well represents this negotiation between capitalist creative destruction perpetuated by the state (replacing an old, elite, modernist structure with a new one) and the struggle for the local commons by motorcyclists and others.



Illustration 3.4: Alagoinhas, April 2013 (before city intervention) <sup>40</sup>

In addition to being the site of the weekly motorcycle meetup, it is also frequented by fisherman and youngsters, though the media criminalizes it as a haven of drug abuse, prostitution, and murder. Because of this perception, and the focus on providing infrastructure for tourists (rather than citizens) in Maceió, the city is currently undertaking construction of a new monument to replace the remaining fragments of the IATE Clube (De Mutiis, June 19, 2014). Construction already started to take shape

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<sup>40</sup> Photo by Author

during my fieldwork as the contractors began to cordon off the parking lot with sheets of metal to discourage entry. The motorcyclists persisted with their event for a time despite these barriers, but eventually were forced to find a new meeting spot. It remains to be seen if they will be able to recommence activities once the new tourist attraction is built.



Illustration 3.5: Alagoinhas, July 2014 (after beginning city construction) <sup>41</sup>

When looking at the place of Alagoinhas and the multitude of spaces that have been created in it, we must recognize the gaps between utopian promises of State-sponsored tourism and the dystopian actuality of life in the city, namely the enclosure of the commons, the exclusion of residents from infrastructure designed for a transient elite, and the attempted erasures of undesirable bodies from the cityscape. These spaces,

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<sup>41</sup> Photo by Author

however, do succeed at times in creating conditions that deconstruct the potency of wealth, privilege, and power within their bounds.

The M/Cs help bring about such ruptures through their weekly occupation of the empty lot in front of Alagoinhas. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write of the nomadic warrior previously invoked, “his eccentricity necessarily appears in negative form: stupidity, deformity, madness, illegitimacy, usurpation, sin” (p. 353-4). They identify the three sins of the warrior, which engender this perception and include sin: (1) Against the King; (2) Against the Priest; and (3) Against the laws originating in the State. The weekly gathering at Alagoinhas manifests these transgressions to varying degrees, revealing the construction of this space and the M/C members as eccentric in this negative light. This encounter sins against the King (Money) by creating a sociality in this space that interrupts the State’s imagination of the beach as a place kept pristine for tourists and elites. The sin against the Priest is expressed through the attempt by mass media to criminalize the site as violent and promiscuous. Finally, there is the sin against the State itself, which is now physically taking measures to reclaim and reorganize this space back into the elite networks of power from which it was originally wrested.

## **NA BEIRA DO MAR**

To understand the State positioning of this place, and the various informal space making activities carried out within its bounds, Perry (2004) provides some helpful framework in her discussion of revitalization projects geared towards generating tourism in Bahia. She writes, “In Bahian tourism politics, both the city centre and all areas along the shore of the Baía de Todos os Santos (Bay of All Saints) are strategically important for the development of leisure and cultural sites. Salvador has implemented a series of

projects intended to recuperate, restore, and ‘revitalise’ the environment of the urban centre” (p. 813). The impending destruction/construction at Alagoinhas embodies a similar type of politics that Perry describes. Alagoinhas is an example of one such a project, though the city does not make their motivations totally explicit, such an attitude is clearly reflected in the constant refocusing of the city’s infrastructure towards transient tourist populations.

I arrived in Maceió for fieldwork the day the World Cup began and experienced the tournament from a city minor to the event’s relevance, but accustomed to being central to tourism in Brazil. During my initial search for housing, I spoke to the managers of many hotels and hostels in the beach neighborhoods (Ponta Verde, Pajuçara, and Jatiúca) – the only places where such infrastructure really exists. I ended up negotiating a very good monthly rate at a hostel in Ponta Verde due to this dearth of typical tourist traffic, but the manager was not very happy about it. He complained, as many of the other managers had, about loss of revenue this year and concern that Maceió’s infrastructural capacity to support tourists now lagged behind other cities like Salvador and Recife, where there were World Cup stadiums. Located between these cities, they all expressed a desire for the city to amplify its image in order to encourage people to stop and stay while in transit. The State’s goals align with those of those invested in the mainstream hospitality industry, and their developmental response to the desires I heard expressed by hotel managers is clear in projects like Alagoinhas and other major beach-side construction projects.

Another stark monument to these politics is the new shopping center constructed in a beach neighborhood, Cruz das Almas, that until recently had escaped the creeping gentrification of the city. The new mall features many high end stores and a steeply priced Outback Steakhouse. Over the course of my fieldwork I visited this mall and was

greeted by a display of gleaming (and expensive) Harley Davidson motorcycles. These bikes stood in stark contrast to the 50 and 125cc Hondas on display in Shopping Pátio, the mall that stands next to one of the mototaxi posts I visited in the working class neighborhood of Benedito Bentes, towards the interior of the city. It is not a mistake that Brazilian motorcycling slang calls the riders of these expensive Harley imports “coxinhas”- a term that more generally means a false person or a friend with bad faith.

Perry continues “While this process of urban change is considered a necessary step towards ‘modernity’ and greater capital accumulation, black communities like Gamboa de Baixo suffer as they are transformed into profit-making tourist sites without them” (p. 820-1). Since I have left Maceió, Facebook pages like Trânsito Maceió and Maceió da Depressão have been frequently posting about roundups of “criminals” by the beach (often with celebratory overtones followed by a highly polarized discussion in the accompanying comments). The celebratory overtones come from the fact that nearly everyone in the city has had some degree of experience with being assaulted and robbed (if not personally, then certainly a friend or a relative) and no one likes to be robbed. This elicits from many a knee jerk response of overzealous enthusiasm for policing, while neglecting to acknowledge the State and other hegemonic forces that push black and brown civilians into situations of extreme need, foster their hyper exposure to physical and structural violence in the city, and pre-inscribe criminality upon their bodies.

The articulation of this process can be seen in Maceió through examples like the mototaxi post in Ponta Verde earlier discussed, which hides behind the tourist hub of the Pavilhão do Artesanato, rather than experiencing the same official engagement as the “credentialed” taxi post in the front. In this manner, Perry concludes that “Urban spaces are terrains of constant struggle for black and poor people” (Perry 2004, p. 828). Though the members of the motorcycle clubs in Maceió range in terms of race and class, the



majority are non-white, working and middle class, long term residents of Maceió (or Alagoas/the Northeast) who engage in these circuits as a way of tying themselves to the local and regional structures from which the State attempts to divorce them. The IATE Clube Encontro illustrates an articulation of this daily struggle.

### **IATE CLUBE ENCONTRO**

This weekly meetup is primarily a social event attended by the members of motorcycle clubs/groups of Maceió. The first time I attended, I immediately ran into Medeiros of Panteras M/C. We chatted a bit and he explained to me how this event functions.

Each week the organizer of the event changes, and the responsibility falls on different members/clubs of the M/C community. This week a gentleman named Morcegão was in charge. The event is sponsored by Atlântica Motos - a Honda dealership - one of the largest (if not the largest) dealerships in Maceió. They provide materials for the event - tents, a large inflatable arch, and a “Carro de Som” (a large truck with speakers out of which forró was blasting and from the top of which the sponsor can make announcements through a microphone). Medeiros explained, however, that the event will be moving shortly because the city will be tearing down the remains of the IATE Clube structure in order to begin a new construction project (some sort of tourist attraction/observation point). Medeiros pointed out how there were already barriers enclosing the parking area - a harbinger of the coming construction.



Illustration 3.6: The Carro de Som at the IATE Clube Encontro (note the barricades in the backdrop of the photo) <sup>42</sup>

After we spoke, Medeiros introduced me to a number of motorcyclists at the event. First to Edboy, the president of his own motorcycle club and the Vice President of the Association of Motoclubes and Motogrupos of Alagoas. Edboy and I were able to speak briefly, but he did not have much time to converse because as a sort of social chair for the event he had to circulate. He also served as the event photographer. In our conversation Edboy explained that the purpose of the Association was to officially register all the clubs of Alagoas. Each club pays a tax to the association and in turn the association is able to provide support to events like this one. Later, from the Carro de Som, Edboy introduced me to the whole gathered crowd and had me raise my hand so that everyone could know me and why I am there.

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<sup>42</sup> Photo by Author

Next, Medeiros introduced me to Morcegão, this week's event coordinator. Morcegão was quite the character. He was dressed in all black satin with the Batman symbol bedazzled upon his chest in rhinestones. He also had a large black Batman cape (with cutouts and all). He welcomed me to the event, though he too did not have much time for conversation as he had social commitments as organizer.



Illustration 3.7: Morcegão <sup>43</sup>

Morcegão's affective character demonstrates one way in which M/Cs problematizes boundaries between human & machine and human & animal - through the invocation of animal motifs. As mentioned, my first introduction to the M/C community of Maceió was through the club, Panteras (Panthers). Many clubs I met throughout my fieldwork made similar choices to incarnate animals in their patches and persona. Examples from Maceió include a chapter of the established 1%er club Abutres

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<sup>43</sup> Photo by Author

(Vultures), a solo all-female club Corujas da Estrada (Street Owls), and, of course, Morceção (lit. Giant Bat). Not only do the M/Cs rewrite boundaries through their unions with machine, but also with animals. To describe an identity suitable to the transgressive coalition created between human and motorcycle, the M/C members form overlapping unions with other living organisms. Haraway (1989) writes:

The story of compulsory reproductive sexuality is never far in the background in primate visions. The multiplicity of surrogates confuses the questions of alliances and the nature of progeny, but not for a moment does all the boundary crossing - of species barriers, machine-organism barriers, language barriers, earth-space barriers - relax the injunction to be fruitful and multiply, heterosexually. Communication is the foundation and goal of the whole innocent-transgressive enterprise. The progeny are cyborgs, creatures with ambiguous and permeable boundaries: monkeys, apes, and humans, all entwined in a compulsory reproductive politics. (p. 146)

To illustrate one of these reproductive circuits in the context of the Maceió, I recall the story of Patrícia, the only independent (not riding pillion with a man) female member of a motorcycle club there. The M/Cs of Maceió, to some extent, do maintain some heteronormative constructions of family - male/female heterosexual relationships are standard, with the male literally in the seat of power (piloting the motorcycle). However, in the course of my fieldwork I met a woman interjecting herself into these structures in a transgressive way.

## **PATRÍCIA**

Patrícia is the only woman in Maceió who is in a motorcycle club in her own right. Though there were many women at the event sporting cuts, Medeiros explained that they were all associated with the M/Cs as wives or girlfriends of members rather than members in their own right. I was able to speak with Patrícia at length.

Patrícia is president, founder, and sole member of her own M/C, Corujas da Estrada. She said it is easier that way, no drama, no arguments. Though she admitted that when she goes for longer rides, she usually rides with members of other clubs. She said it is dangerous - for a woman especially - to ride alone. She says she does get a lot of looks on the highway from other motorists who cannot believe that it is a woman piloting the bike. Patrícia explained that she used to be a member of Panteras, but that it caused too much drama. In particular, she referenced the jealousy from the wives and girlfriends of the other members. She said that these feelings seem to have lessened since she branched out to form her own club.

I asked her if she encountered much prejudice as a woman on a motorcycle. She said yes, though more strongly from other women rather than from men. When she formed her own club she needed a “padrinho” (sponsor/godfather), who is Medeiros. Patrícia has two children: a son (12 years old) who is not that into motorcycles - she said he is embarrassed to be seen on her bike, which her son calls a girl’s bike - “Coisa do pai” she explained rolling her eyes. She also has a daughter (4 years old) - “minha corujinha” - she cooed, who is crazy for motorcycles and would like a pink one. Patrícia says that she will teach her to ride when she is older, but for now she contents herself with sitting on the bike (in neutral) and revving the motor. I noted that there were a number of children at the event sporting motorcycle cuts and she said that is quite common and that her daughter has one of her own.



Illustration 3.8: Patrícia's M/C Cut <sup>44</sup>

She then explained to me the number of buttons and a patches on her cut. She said generally one side is reserved for buttons from your own M/C and the other for those of other clubs, but on hers they were all mixed up. She also showed me the back, which had a large patch for her club and a number of smaller ones for others. Again, she said that this is also not typical - usually the back is reserved for only your own M/C. She also showed me her motorcycle, which had stickers for her club and a couple others. She told me that these stickers and patches were not only decoration, but also helped promote accountability among motorcyclists, because when you pass everyone will know who you

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<sup>44</sup> Photo by Author

are associated with. The patch comes with responsibility. “Medeiros já explicou a diferença entre motoqueiro e motociclista, né Kate?” she pressed me. “Já” I assured her. Then she gave me a sticker and a pin from her club.

Though she first experienced resistance in integrating herself into this community, as a female motorcyclist operating outside of the heteronormative structure, she was able to succeed in making a space for herself. In order to accomplish this, she had to find a surrogate path of self reproduction.

### **DIA INTERNACIONAL DE MOTOCICLISTA**

One evening (towards the end of my fieldwork) Mauro, the president of Panteras M/C, arrived at my hostel in the early evening to bring me to the neighboring city of Rio Largo for the first day of a three day event that leads up to a commemoration of the International Day of Motorcyclists on Sunday, July 27th. He arrived with a black polo t-shirt in hand with the Panteras crest on the back and my name on the front. I smiled and thanked him profusely for the kind and thoughtful gift. I was surprised to see that he had come by car. He explained that he had borrowed it from his daughter because he was concerned about the rain predicted for that evening. He said to me, “Olha, como estamos de carro, não vai chover...mas se fomos de moto, haveria chuva com certeza”<sup>45</sup> and laughed.

The advantage of this, however, was that it allowed us time to talk during the ride. I asked him about the event, the plans for the weekend, and the purpose behind it. He explained that it was mainly an excuse to get together and have a good time. He chuckled, but said that there are more to these events than just partying. They are also a

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<sup>45</sup> Author’s Translation: “Watch, since we drove it’s not going to rain...but if we came on the motorcycle, there would have been rain for sure.”

way to help unite the community, move forward together through greater understanding, and build bonds of friendship.

He said that the community still struggles against a negative image, which comes from people outside the motoclubes and looking in. I asked him where he felt this conception comes from. He speculated that it comes from the associations people have about motorcycle clubs in the U.S. (namely 1%ers) and images people have from television and film. He asked me if I knew about the club Abutres and if they existed in the U.S. I said that I didn't know if they had U.S. chapters, but that I had seen some of their members at the IATE club weekly meet up and noticed the 1%er patch on their cuts. He said they had only recently started coming to the weekly meet up, but, as I may have noticed, they remained slightly removed from the the rest and stood apart on the fringe. I said that yes I had noticed and that they also did not sport any paraphernalia of other clubs on their cuts. He sighed and said “É...estamos seguindo em frente...a passo da tartaruga.”<sup>46</sup>

I was really impressed that Mauro's idea of moving forward in terms of improving their image involved greater inclusion of the clubs that are the focus of this prejudice rather than trying to distance themselves.

We also talked about what makes a “verdadeiro” motorcyclist. He explained that it is something that comes from the person and their spirit rather than how many cylinders their motorcycle has (as common prejudice would suggest). He pointed to a man passing us on a small 125cc bike, cheap and beat up, with an inexpensive helmet and said, “Repare aí, ele pode ser motociclista, até pessoal de biz [50cc] pode, não importa.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Author's Translation: “Yeah...we are moving forward...at the pace of a turtle.”

<sup>47</sup> Author's Translation: “Check it out, he could be a motociclista, even those who drive 50cc bikes can, it does not matter.”





Illustration 3.9: “Be humble, the size or make of your motorcycle does not make you a better person! Motorcycling is about Brotherhood and Respect! Keep that in mind.” <sup>48</sup>

He then explained to me how he came to ride. He bought his first bike simply out of need - transportation for work and to visit his father. Eventually, he started taking small trips on his bike and decided to upgrade in order to ease travel. He grew to love it as more than simple practicality and never stopped. He said he greatly prefers motorcycles to cars (he does not own a car) because the sensation and liberty is so much greater on a bike. He now has taken many trips with his club, including one all the way to the Uruguayan border. He said the most difficult part about this trip was keeping

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<sup>48</sup> Image Source: Facebook

everyone together - some wanted to go fast, others slow, everyone has their own personal pace - but they all got there eventually. It took about eight days.

## **FLOODING**

On the ride Mauro also explained to me how Rio Largo had suffered a flood a few years back damaging most of the structures and houses of the town center. He pointed out to me the marks on the buildings from where the water had risen, the floodline still visible on most of the towns structures.

When we arrived in Rio Largo, Mauro lamented his decision to take the car and pointed out to me the lack of rain. He explained that he had recently traded in his old bike for a “custom” that he wanted to “inaugurar” this evening. When we arrived at the Panteras tent the club members too lamented the new bike’s absence.

In the meantime, two bands were already in full swing on the sound stages set up for the event - a rock band on the main stage and a forró group on a smaller platform. The two seemed to be competing for sonic dominance and, combined with all the revving motors, it was difficult to even hear yourself think. The event took place in a lot alongside some disused railroad tracks. There were some tents selling food, a large booth by Atlântica Motos with some of their flashier bikes on display, and another booth selling insurance. A couple motoclubes had the honor of their own tent, including Panteras. Although cars parked on neighboring streets, the motorcycles rolled right up into the lot. The Panteras slid their bikes under their tent where they could keep a watchful eye on them as attendees circulated, admired, and occasionally took photos. I also noticed many clubs strung their helmets up together from their tent posts, though Panteras perched theirs on their motos themselves. Neusvaldo, one member, pointed to one of his

comrade's helmets, "Olha nessa aí, Kate, vão achar ele ladrão"<sup>49</sup> he told me with a grin (because it was a cheaper model).



Illustration 3.10: Atlântica Motos Display at Dia Internacional de Motociclista, Rio Largo<sup>50</sup>

### **RIO LARGO**

The Panteras were all pleased to see me sporting my new shirt and delighted that I liked the gift. A few of us went to get some food, which Mauro refused to let me pay for. Many of the wives, girlfriends, and children of the Panteras had come to attend the event as well. While we all sat and talked I noticed a line of sharp-dressed youngsters standing along the train tracks, above and apart from the general melee, just watching. I remembered what Mauro said about the view from the outside and people being wary of

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<sup>49</sup> Author's Translation: "Check out that one, Kate, they are going to think he is a thief."

<sup>50</sup> Photo by Author

the clubs. I was a little confused about why they all dressed up to stand at a distance and observe, however.

My question was answered later as things got under way a bit more. The youths began their own revelry alongside the festival blasting funk and forró music from speakers in the trunk of a car. I'm not sure if this is a regular event for the young people of Rio Largo, but I can't help but suspect that the sound blanket provided by the dueling bands of the motofest enabled them to carry out their own festivities unimpeded. The noise of their blasting music was a drop in the bucket compared to this event, while on any other night I'm sure it would be far more obtrusive to the shopkeepers and residents of the small town. It intrigued me that although these young folks certainly maintained themselves apart from the bikers, there was a certain symbiotic relationship of sound practice.

Sound space endures as a heated ground of contestation in Maceió between residents and the State. Recently, police have been cracking down on the use of these car sound systems for entertainment in public spaces (Sedres/O Secretário de Defesa Social e Ressocialização de Alagoas, April 20, 2015). Though an ingrained part of local, public culture, this use of sound threatens the tourist-centered order that the State intends to maintain. By creating these spaces of unbridled sound, the motorcycle clubs work in concert with other assemblages of local culture to facilitate their own operations in the cityspace.

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As the evening drew to a close we all pitched in to help pick up trash, stack tables and chairs, and make sure the area was clean and neat for the following day's festivities. Mauro drove me home, both of us temporarily a little deaf from all the noise. Neusvaldo, who left at the same time as us on his motorcycle, rode alongside the car until he had to

turn off towards his home. He sounded a friendly double tap on the buzina in salute, which Mauro returned, and rode off into the night.

There was not a drop of rain all evening.

### **Conclusion: Rolando Moto**

The day I flew out of Maceió, at the end of my fieldwork, I reserved a “Taxi Credenciado” to take me to the airport (in order to accommodate my hefty luggage). The driver picked me up on time and everything was going smoothly until we hit Fernandes Lima. Though there is always traffic on the avenue, the traffic we came upon had the stagnant yet tense feeling of not having moved for a while with no intention of moving anytime soon. The driver soon was on the phone to a relative to find out what was going on, though I think we already both knew. As I had seen so many times, protesters had yet again managed to freeze movement in the city by occupying the avenue. The group that caused the standstill on that day was the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra (MST), one of the largest social movements in Brazil (and throughout Latin America), and one of the few that was able to maintain the momentum of their demonstrations once the glamor of World Cup protesting faded. Though worried about missing my flight, I was glad to see that these folks had not lost their vitality since the previous year.

MST was founded in 1984, but the roots of the movement’s spirit stretch further back in Brazilian history, particularly in the Northeast. In many ways the MST is a continuation of the work of Lampião and the cangaceiros, who similarly fought against the wealthy landed class in attempt to support agrarian workers with few rights and

resources. The means of struggle, of course, contrast dramatically with Lampião's tactics. Lampião was a mobile bandit, constantly on the move throughout the rural Northeast in order to escape authorities. The members of the MST in Maceió mobilize differently, by bringing rural issues into urban spaces to demand justice and creating trans-urban networks of rural solidarity. This tension between rurality and urbanism reveals cracks in this duality, another State mechanism of control.

Other less organized groups have also carried on with protests in Maceió and its peripheries, including the community of Barra de Santo Antônio along the northern route leaving town, who recently brought traffic to a halt (TNH1, April 27, 2015). Though the news story failed to report the demands of the residents, an unsurprising omission in mainstream media, it is not hard to speculate about the numerous injustices that would move these residents to protest, namely the myriad forces of structural racism that push black and poor communities to the peripheries and perpetuate their exclusion from the city infrastructure in place for elites and tourists. The tool at their disposal, once more, is a reclamation of territory and an arrest of aristocratic mobility. Both the MST and the residents of Barra de Santo Antônio interrupt the rural/urban binary with their protests, which causes significant rupture in the State organism.

### **O VAQUEIRO E O MOTORISTA**

The cordel<sup>51</sup> piece “O Vaqueiro e O Motorista” speaks to this seeming irreconcilability of the rural and urban (Branco, undated, circa 1993-94). In contemporary Brazil, however, motorcycles are clearly demonstrating the way these lines can be complicated. Motorcycles are beginning to play a substantial role in agriculture in

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<sup>51</sup> A style of informal literature popular in the Northeast, printed on individual leafs of paper or small pamphlets, and displayed for sale on a string “cordel” outside of newstands.

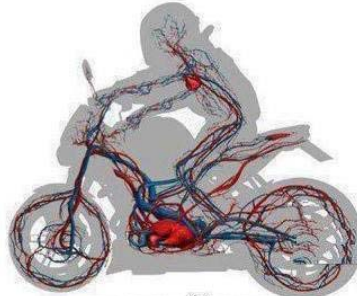
the Northeast, as they increasingly replace mules as beasts of burden in agriculture (Madeiro, August 30, 2011 and Globo Repórter, November 23, 2012). During my fieldwork a young man in his early twenties passed through the hostel where I was staying. I met him one evening in the common area of our hostel. We started talking when he complemented me on my boots. His compliment led me to ask if that was his motorcycle parked out front. The motorcycle did indeed belong to him, he had ridden it up from Salvador the previous day because he was on vacation from his job in the Department of Agriculture. Outside of work he also belongs to a motorcycle club in Salvador, and he too was intrigued by the increasing of integration of motorcycles in agriculture.

The first stanza of “O Vaqueiro e O Motorista” opens, “Já escreveram poemas de chofer trilhando a pista/ de vaqueiro novo e bravo/e velho curto da vista/mas, nunca fizeram dupla de Vaqueiro o Motorista,” which translates “They have already written poems about the driver cruising the road/of the young and brave cowboy/and the old short-sighted man/but, never have they made a pair of the Cowboy and the Motorist.” Though the document is not dated, the price for the cordel listed at top is Cr\$1,00 or one cruzeiro real, a currency that lasted less than a year in Brazil between 1993 and 1994. The poems ten stanzas go through the dualistic antagonisms between the motorist in the cowboy, “é um fardado de pano/outro fardado de couro” (“one uniformed in cotton/the other uniformed in leather”).

The poem itself does not reconcile the oppositional traits it sets up for motorists and cowboys, placing each in its own category, but each boundary it establishes is complicated when the motorcyclist comes into play. From the couplet above, for example, it is clear that the cowboy sports the leather uniform, needing durable clothes to last while working outdoors on horseback. The motorcyclist, however, also finds the

utility of such a uniform. At the fissure of each couplet, rides a motorcycle, splitting lanes in the customary fashion, pushing past these basic dualisms. Even between the two characters in the title hides a motorcyclist. If you truncate the terms, taking the “moto” from “motorista” and the “queiro” from “vaquero” you can find the ever elusive “motoqueiro”.

***MOTO: Essa paixão  
não se explica, apenas se sente***



***SE VC NÃO SENTE  
VC JAMAIS ENTENDERÁ***

Illustration 3.11: “Moto: This passion is inexplicable, you just feel it. If you don’t feel it, you will never understand.” <sup>52</sup>

### **MOTOQUEIROS DO LAMBADÃO**

Several months ago, the Facebook Page, Feicibuqui di Pobre, shared a video of two dancers demonstrating their prolific skills by a highway in an unidentified rural area. Below the video, the page added the caption “Onde foi isso? fiquei de boca aberta #comendomosca” (March 9, 2015) <sup>53</sup> with a link to download the song playing in the video. From the comment feed I was able to learn that the dancers are part of a group

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<sup>52</sup> Image Source: Facebook. Author’s Translation

<sup>53</sup> Author’s Translation: “Where was this? my jaw dropped #swallowingflies”



called Motoqueiros do Lambadão, which hails from Cuiabá, Mato Grosso - a city close to Brazil's western border with Bolivia. Lambadão is a type of regional dance that requires an immense amount of skill, cooperation, and embodied performance of locality. The group, in their combination motorcycling and dance, create a prismatic hybrid of collective expression that reflects a complicating light on the landscape of Brazil. Feicibuqui di Pobre later posted a second video from the Motoqueiros do Lambadão, filmed in the same location, with the subheading "Oque Aconteceu? O Raio Caiu duas Vezes no mesmo Lugar?" (March 13, 2015)<sup>54</sup>; and a third entitled "Trablho VS Brincadeira Veja oque acontece!"<sup>55</sup> that features two young men working in a field, when they suddenly drop their tools to dance with one another, intermittently trading off the male and female roles of the movements.

I was not surprised when I learned the dancers were motorcyclists. They danced in the shoulder of the highway, but would often twirl across the painted line meant to forbid pedestrian transgressions. As they danced, vehicles passed and the two hardly noticed, even when they had only just spun out of the way in time to avoid their knee or foot kissing the bumper of the car. In their dance, the pursuit of the motorcycle-cyborg becomes clear: complicating boundaries while preserving a connection to the land, crossing lines while creating new ones wild enough to evade inscription, questioning rules while maintaining loyalty to community values, tempting regulatory structures, but always spinning just beyond their grasp.

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<sup>54</sup> Author's Translation: "What happened? Did lightning strike twice?"

<sup>55</sup> Author's Translation: "Work VS Play Watch what happens!"

## UM MOTO ABRAÇO

In their afterword to the volume *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship* (Ed. Hale 2013) entitled “Activist Scholars or Radical Subjects?” Joy James and Edmund Gordon call for activists scholars to deconstruct institutional power as academic-bound radical subjects. They write “Exploring political action unauthorized by the institution, we may find a level of ‘performance’ that institutions will be forced to ignore because they cannot interpret activism within a totalizing, assimilating narrative. Imagine transport as mobility, mobility as potentiality” (p. 372). As an academic-bound motorcyclist, through discussion and collaboration with my two-wheeled comrades in Brazil, I have sought to step outside of totalizing narratives of academia to discuss political action that bobs and weaves through institutional structure, taking advantage of its rigidity, to find spaces of resistance.

“Float like a butterfly and sting like a bee. Your hands can’t hit what your eyes can’t see.”

-Muhammand Ali

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## **Vita**

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